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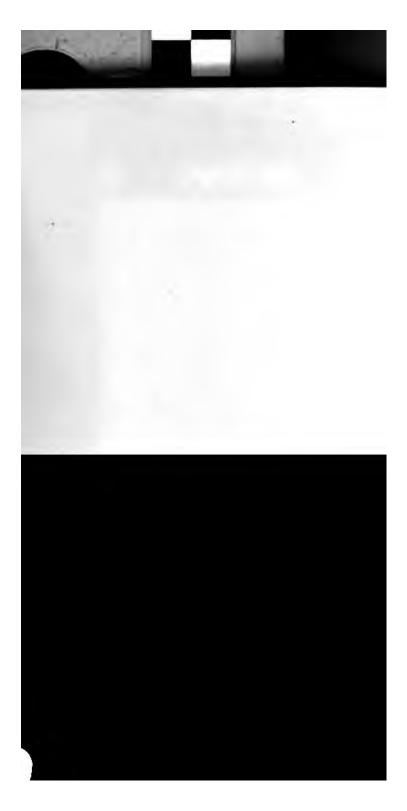
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NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

VOL. I.



NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

BY

JULIA RATTRAY WADDINGTON,

AUTHOR OF "MISREPRESENTATION," &c., &c.

" Gold-the rich man's idol, and the poor man's dream."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

CHAPTER I.

Westbourne Park with its wide lawns and sweeping avenues—its shadowy walks and sparkling waters—its mansion, spacious, yet well devised—old and yet cheerful, is a beautiful spot; and never, perhaps, did Westbourne appear to more advantage than on a certain summer afternoon when a party of gaily dressed individuals were seen wandering about the grounds, thus giving a greater air of animation to the scene than it usually presented. For, in spite of all its loveliness, Westbourne was a deserted home, whose owner resided almost constantly abroad.

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It was a sort of pic-nic party, promoted by the Honourable Mrs. Daventry, and consisting of herself and grand-daughter, a lively damsel of eighteen, on whose behalf this party had been formed; two or three families residing in the neighbourhood, Sophia Bransby, a pretty, smiling, girl, who was a great favourite of Mrs. Daventry's, and one or two of the officers of the —th Dragoons.

As these gentlemen were in uniform, they were in great favour with the ladies of the party; and very much pleased was that fair one whom Captain Brownlow or Mr. Vavasour addressed or walked beside. And the gentlemen, being perfectly aware of their importance, dispensed their patronage with entire impartiality, at least during the former part of the afternoon; as it grew later, it was observed that Captain Brownlow gave his arm to Mrs. Daventry, and that his brother-in-arms and Sophy Bransby had lost themselves.

"Where can they be? What can become of them?" was asked, when the party was beginning to re-assemble previous to a final dispersion. "What can have become of Miss Bransby and Mr. Vavasour? And where were they last seen?"

And Mrs. Daventry, who chaperoned Sophy, was on the point of despatching the gallant Captain in quest of his friend and her protégée, when the truants were observed emerging from a most inviting looking, shady, well sequestered walk, Sophy a little in advance with her blond veil down, and her eyes so pertinaciously fastened on the ground that it was not wonderful she should have missed her way; and Mr. Vavasour swinging his glove with one hand, and in the other holding a sprig of myrtle, with which a certain old bachelor, supposed to admire Sophy, had presented her about an hour before.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Daventry to her

grand-child, when driving homewards, "what do you think of Westbourne?"

"That it is a very pretty place; so pretty, indeed, that were I Sir Henry Tollemache, I should not forsake it, even for the shores of the Mediterranean."

"Ah," said Mrs. Daventry with a half sigh, "in my younger days it was very different. Landed proprietors then contrived to amuse themselves at home; and let people say what they like about economy or climate, it is amusement, and amusement only, which takes them abroad. If I were Chancellor of the Exchequer, a good round tax on absentees should make them pay for their desertion."

"Well," replied Emma Daventry, "I love amusement dearly, and yet I believe I could be happy, very happy, in such a place as Westbourne. What do you think, Sophy? Should you desire a more splendid, animated home?"

" I? Oh, something infinitely humbler would satisfy my wishes."

"Apretty cottage ornée, perhaps, covered with roses and honeysuckles; with a neat garden, overstocked with flowers."

" Yes; that sounds very tempting."

"After all," said Emma Daventry, with an air of mock gravity, "how little do we really want to make us happy. Books, flowers, and a congenial companion. Are not these sufficient?"

"I think so. And Westbourne proves the truth of your remark; a fine house, park, grounds, conservatory; everything in fact to render it a most delightful residence, yet the owner forsakes it; and so do the owners of numberless fine places."

"Very true, my dear; but for all that, I don't advise a cottage," answered Mrs. Daventry rather pointedly, and Sophia blushed. "Cottages are very inconvenient; very often damp; besides, their chimnies almost

always smoke. As the family increases, too, how great the annoyance. Children squalling in one room, saying their lessons in another; servants knocking the furniture about, doors slamming, windows rattling, boards creaking, bells ringing, and no one to answer them; one head of the family out of temper, the other, perhaps, in tears."

"What a tempting picture, grandmama!"

"It is not overdrawn. The petty annoyances of poverty are frequently more wearing to the temper, more injurious even to the heart, than real misfortunes. Many a disposition, which would bear up under actual calamities, will become changed and absolutely ruined by poverty—especially among men."

"I see your drift;" said Emma, "and so perhaps does Sophy. You want to frighten us from forming foolish marriages. As far as I am concerned, there is little hazard of such a calamity: I love the good things of this world far too surpassingly to give up my

chance of enjoying them for any body; and I candidly confess, I should no more think of marrying a man who could not maintain me as I have hitherto lived, than I should of becoming a nun. Why do you smile, Sophia?"

"At the alternative you propose." Sophia answered, but not quite candidly. In her inmost heart she suspected, that if Mr. Vavasour had devoted himself to the lively Emma, in place of losing his way with her, that young lady would have been less mercenary, or, it may be, prudent in her determination; for although Frederick Vavasour was known to possess nothing beyond his commission and two hundred a year, he was a universal favourite with middle aged, old, and young, ladies. Why?-He was extremely handsome, well-born, lively, good tempered, and well-bred -and Captain Brownlow the reverse. A brewer's son-a little, dingy, peevish looking man; with, however, that grand redeeming point-plenty of money.

"You do not think," resumed the lively Emma, "I am made for a recluse?"

"Far from it. I consider that you are better calculated to enact the graceful matron; and so, perhaps, does Captain Brownlow."

A slight shadow darkened Emma's laughing eyes. "Don't talk of Captain Brownlow, I think him quite insufferable——"

"My dear!" interposed Mrs. Daventry, looking round at her grand-daughter, with an expression of incredulous astonishment, which, however, Emma did not seem to heed, and she resumed—

"So utterly devoid of ton, or even gentleman-like breeding."

"My dear!" again said Mrs. Daventry;

"what can you mean by calling Captain
Brownlow ill-bred? Did you not observe
how politely he offered me his arm and insisted on my taking it, which proves that he
is even something more than well-bred; for
it is not every man who will hamper himself
with a tired old woman when there are plenty

of young ones ready for his notice. No, no; Captain Brownlow is very far from being ill-mannered. He is, besides, sensible, well informed, and——"

"Handsome, well connected, lively and agreeable?"

"As to his being handsome, he certainly is not exactly an Adonis; but I have seen uglier men, and what is more, known women fall in love with them."

"Then they were very clever, I suppose-I'm not certain that I might not fall in love with an ugly man myself, provided he were superlatively clever—and a gentleman."

"With regard to Captain Brownlow's connexions they might be better, certainly. His father was a brewer——"

" Is," interrupted Miss Daventry.

"Well, is; but he cannot live for ever, you know; and every body says he is immensely rich; and when he dies, which I dare say will happen very soon——"

"Grandmama, Mr. Brownlow is only fiftyfive or six, so he may live these twenty years, or more."

" Who told you that, my dear?"

"Mrs. Carr Wilson, who knows all about the Brownlows."

"How came she to speak upon the subject? I hope, Emma, you did not make any indiscreet inquiries?"

"Not at all, grandmama; Mrs. Carr Wilson volunteered her information: perhaps, in consequence of the Captain's gallantry to you. She gave me a full account of the whole family; I assure you, it was anything but promising—six sisters; two married, four yet to be disposed of; and all vulgar, and fat; three brothers; one, of course, in his father's business, one a clergyman and one a tallow-chandler, I believe."

"I wish Mrs. Carr Wilson had kept her information to herself," thought Mrs. Daventry; while she remarked aloud, "Mrs. Carr Wilson's statements are not always to be depended on."

"I never heard that before," said Em-

"Perhaps not, my dear; and yet it is the case. Mrs. Wilson is greatly given to exaggeration; and in this instance, I have no doubt, that if Captain Brownlow had paid her daughter the same compliment he did to you, Emma, there would have been neither tallow-chandler nor vulgar daughter in the family."

"Perhaps, also," replied Emma, with an arch smile, "Mr. Brownlow is sixty-eight or even seventy years old, and not likely to live above a few months."

Mrs. Daventry tried to appear displeased with the lively rattle, but the endeavour failed.

"However," continued Emma, "even if he should be only fifty-five and in the enjoyment of excellent health, it does not follow that he will ever attain a green old age. Brewers, you know, are liable to very serious shawl and other walking garments, she seated herself upon the window seat, and remained plunged in deep reflection. Of a pleasant nature were her contemplations, at least if a bright smile and a glistening eye betoken pleasurable thoughts.

A sharp knock at the door interrupted her reveries.

"Come in;" she said, hastily starting up;

"come in." And a tall, starch looking serving
woman entered.

"If you please, Miss Sophy, Miss Bransby desired me to say, that if you wish for any dinner, it can be served in the library; she and the Captain have dined this hour or two, but some of the shoulder" (they had a shoulder of mutton for dinner) "has been kept hot, and if you wish it, William can lay the table in the library. But you'll be so good as to decide at once, my mistress says, for she wants to send him into Knotsford and there's no time to lose;

t seven now."

"Oh no, Draper," cried Sophy, all her agreeable reflections taking wing at once, "not on my account. I do not wish for anything, I have dined."

"Very well, Ma'am; then William may set off at once." And Draper walked out of the room, and down stairs, without the least regarding that Sophia was following her.

She was a favourite domestic, and Sophia an unfavoured and nearly dependent relative; and she felt herself, in consequence, entirely privileged to be as disrespectful as she pleased in her intercourse with "Miss Sophia," and, perhaps, this was less surprising as her manner towards her mistress was not particularly deferential. In the present instance, she flung open the door of the sitting-room, exclaiming in a shrill voice—

- "Miss Sophia doesn't wish for any dinner, and William's going off directly."
- "Where is Miss Sophia?" Pettishly enquired an elderly little woman dressed in a

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- "Where is Miss Sophia?" Pettishly enquired an elderly little woman dressed in a

black and grey calico gown, with corresponding ribbons in her cap.

"Here, aunt; here I am," said Sophy, trying to look as if she were not at all in awe of her peevish relation; while all the time her heart was beating violently.

Miss Bransby had been looking towards the door so long as Draper stood there, but now her eyes fell on a piece of carpet work on which she had been engaged for the last three years, and in no way whatever did she notice Sophia's entrance. The discouraged girl turned towards the other occupant of the room, a man of about forty, a Captain in the navy, Miss Bransby's brother and consequently uncle to Sophia. He was deep in a county newspaper and merely nodded in return to his niece's salutation.

"I fear I am very late," observed Sophia timidly at last.

"It is late;" replied Miss Bransby, "nearly eight o'clock—ah, there is the clock striking three-quarters, or is it only the half-hour?" "The half-hour only I believe," said Sophy.

"No, it is the three-quarters," retorted Miss

Bransby.

Sophia knew her aunt was wrong, but she also knew that Miss Bransby especially disliked being set right when she was wrong; she therefore held her peace. Captain Bransby pulled out his watch, compared it with the village time-piece, and having ascertained that both were in accordance, replaced it, and once more studied the newspaper. Miss Bransby offering no further remark, Sophia in silence opened her work-box. In due time the third quarter sounded, and at the same time Miss Bransby's worsted broke close off to the stitch she had just completed.

"What execrable worsted!" muttered the elder maiden; "I declare it does nothing but break; I shall be obliged to take out the whole of my dog's face, before I can fasten the end off properly." And without question, she would have scolded Sophy for selecting such an un-

satisfactory material, had she not remembered that she herself had purchased it.

"That seems a troublesome job;" observed Captain Bransby drawing close to his sister, and thereby greatly increasing her annoyance.

"A very troublesome job, indeed."

"Why don't you let Sophy manage it; her eyes are younger than yours, and sharper too."

" Pray suffer me," said Sophy rising.

"No, no; I shall do very well; I want no assistance. I can manage it extremely well. But I'll thank you, Sophy, not to stand between me and the light."

Sophy instantly retreated, and her aunt continued dragging the canvass first in one direction, then in the other, until the whole was drawn and puckered into a most perplexing condition; every lineament of the unhappy Poodle having disappeared; as far, at least, as discrimination went. Long drooping ears and turned up nose and round black eye—all, all, were gone.

"Dear, how tiresome!" exclaimed Miss Bransby getting extremely hot; again Sophy proffered her assistance; "no, no, you'll only make the matter worse. I shall take it tomorrow to Miss Mapleton and tell her that, as the whole fault was in her worsted, she's bound to set it all to rights for me."

"Sophy would do it in an instant," urged Captain Bransby.

But Sophy, thinking two offers of assistance quite sufficient, forbore to make a third; and her aunt, like a true woman or a child, (in many things we of the gentler sex are nothing in the world but children) forthwith became quite willing, even anxious, to make over the unpleasant task to her. But too proud to ask the favour she had already declined, instead of calling Sophia to her aid, she continued pulling and dragging with increased vehemence.

Eight o'clock struck and tea was brought in; not however by William, he being yet absent, and many and fierce were the glances shot by the excited mistress of the mansion, first at her niece, then at the jauntily attired housemaid, then at the tea equipage, and then at her delinquent niece again.

"How awkward women servants are; I hate the very sight of them," observed Miss Bransby, as the serving damsel placed the hissing urn upon the table. "For goodness' sake, Phæbe, take care what you're about. See, you have put that urn down without the rug. Pray think of what you're doing; the table will be ruined. Stupid, awkward creature, how she slams the door!" Miss Bransby continued, while the affrighted Phæbe, with a face nearly as crimson as the rug she had forgotten, almost rushed from the apartment.

"Phœbe's a very tidy looking girl," said Captain Bransby, drawing his chair towards the tea-table; "and now, Sophy, let us hear something about this pic-nic party. Who had you? The Dewhursts, of course."

" Oh yes, the Dewhursts were there, and so

were the Framptons and Lady Newleigh and her daughters."

- " And Sir Thomas ?"
- " No, he would not come."
- "And what did you do? How did you amuse yourselves?"

Sophy described the routine of entertainment followed by the party. She told, how they had seen all the house, admired the pictures, dined under the shadow of a wide spreading beech, and wandered about the grounds. In answer to various queries, even mentioned the contents of the provision baskets and described the dresses worn by some of the ladies. But Sophy did not tell her relatives that she and Mr. Vavasour had lost themselves, or were supposed to have done so; nor did she expatiate much on the pleasure of the afternoon.

"After all, it seems to have been but a poor sort of a thing," observed Captain Bransby.

"Very stupid indeed, I should imagine," said his sister, with, however, far more of good

temper in her tone of voice than hitherto; for as she had been no partaker in the entertainment it was highly consolatory to feel that she had undergone no loss; and Miss Bransby's complacency at length became such, that, ordering the lamp to be brought, she half desired, half requested, Sophia to see what she could make of the unfortunate Poodle's head.

Sophia set about the task with perfect readiness and performed it not amiss, considering that her head ached; her thoughts would willingly have rested upon another object and that her inquisitive aunt, who was sitting close beside, continued plying her with question after question.

"And so," observed Captain Bransby, who was walking up and down the room with his hands in his waistcoat pockets, "so Mr. Vavasour was, as usual, dangling after Emma Daventry; upon my life, I think her grandmother's a monstrous fool to suffer it."

" Very foolish indeed;" replied Miss Brans-

by. "Sophy, you're making the dog's eye green instead of black—no—that's purple; don't you see it written on the card; purple, number three. Very foolish, indeed, it is of Mrs. Daventry; but don't you know she never was remarkable for sense; and then, she thinks so much of family: because she chanced to marry Lord Daventry's younger brother, she looks down on every one who has not what she calls blood: and I dare say she would rather see that silly grand-daughter of hers married to that poor beggar Vavasour, because he's nephew to Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, than to a man with five or six thousand a year who hadn't something of a pedigree."

Sophy remembered the conversation while driving home, and scarcely could she repress a smile: so entirely mistaken was her aunt in her conclusion.

"Mr. Vavasour is not quite a beggar!" she remarked at last, and not in a tone of perfect confidence. "I don't know what you mean by that, Sophia; he certainly doesn't stand in the street with his hat in his hand; but he has nothing, or next to nothing, besides his pay; and very little expectation of ever being better off; so at least, Captain Brownlow informed me."

"Captain Brownlow is a very disagreeable man."

"I see nothing about him, one way or the other," observed Captain Bransby.

"Nor I either," followed Miss Bransby, for she had a pleasure in contradicting. "What makes you call him disagreeable, Sophy?"

"Have you forgotten the last evening we spent at Mrs. Daventry's, when he conducted himself in so very ill-bred a manner towards you, my dear aunt?"

"By George, so he did!" said Captain Bransby, rubbing his hands together, and stopping opposite his sister;—" what was it, Sophy? Muttered something about not being troubled with an ugly old woman, when Mrs. Daventry asked him to take your aunt over to the supper table, didn't he?"

" I believe so."

"But it was very thoughtless of Mrs. Daventry to expect he would; very-"

"Mr. Vavasour was of another way of thinking," remarked Miss Bransby bridling; "he handed me to the refreshment-table, and what was more, staid by me all the remainder of the evening. In spite of his coxcombry, I must say, I think him a very fine young man: the other is no better than a bear."

"Then I am right for once," said Sophy, smiling.

"In your own opinion, I dare say you are never wrong."

"I wish, aunt," rejoined Sophy, with true feminine cunning, "I could remember all the fine things Mr. Vavasour said of you this afternoon."

"I don't wish to hear them, ' was her aunt's reply.

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But Sophy knew she did. Mr. Vavasour's remarks were, in consequence, repeated; and when Miss Bransby, candle in hand, left the parlour for her dormitory, her head was thrown back, a smile was on her lips and she walked with a sort of jaunty step: for Mr. Vavasour had guessed her age at ten years less than its reality; and, moreover, he had said that hers was the style of beauty he admired. This latter was, perhaps, a slight embellishment of Sophy's; or rather the application of the remark. Sophy was fair of skin, and so had been Miss Bransby; Sophy's hair was auburn, and her aunt wore a front of flaxen curls, such as almost all elderly or middle aged ladies and wax dolls appear in.

CHAPTER III.

But, however Miss Bransby might relish Frederick Vavasour's admiration, she was far from approving his union with her niece; and many were Sophia's anxious hours and sleepless nights whilst her marriage destiny was pending. She was an orphan, with just fifty pounds a-year of worldly goods. Her uncle had provided her with education, her aunt had given her a home; but neither were willing to subtract from their own daily comforts or enjoyments, in order that she might marry Frederick Vavasour. And although Sophy and her lover thought this very selfish, it really was not extraordinary, nor, perhaps, blameable; since these unaccommodating people were far from

being wealthy; and as they had passed through life happily enough, although unmarried, they naturally judged their niece might do the same; even should Sophia's oft repeated assurance, that she was certain she should never like any other man sufficiently to marry him, prove itself correct.

"Well, Sophy," said Miss Bransby, "if this does happen, and as you say, you can never get over your affection for Mr. Vavasour, which, by the way, I very much doubt—if, however, I say, it should happen that your attachment to this young man prevents your ever fancying any other gentleman who may chance to fancy you, it will be no very great misfortune, after all. You have a comfortable and a happy home," (Sophy did not feel very acquiescent in this opinion) "affectionate and indulgent relations," (nor in this neither); "what more can you desire? While my brother and I live, you have all this; after our death you will, I suppose, share equally with your cousins the trifle

we may have to leave; I do not speak quite positively on the last point, because you may do something to disoblige your uncle; or he may-may-marry. He is still in the very prime of life, and remarkably young-looking for his age; indeed, many people have married when they were much older." And the air of satisfaction with which Miss Bransby suffered her eyes to rest upon the looking-glass that stood before her, sufficiently betrayed that had she spoken in the plural, instead of singular number, it would have been more sincere. Sophy making no reply, Miss Bransby continued: "You are, I think, a very fortunate girl in having such relations and such a comfortable home. Just consider what it would have been, if instead of living here and being made so much of as you are, you had been obliged to go out as governess or companion? As for maintaining yourself with what you have of your own, it would have been quite impossible; for, you know, Sophy, you are very far from being a good manager-very far indeed;

and to say the truth, that's one reason why I object so strongly to your marrying Mr. Vavasour. Some women can contrive to do a great deal with a narrow income; they seem cut out for poor men's wives; but you are quite of a different cast; and I feel perfectly convinced, that were you to marry Frederick Vavasour, you would both of you repent the having done so only once—I mean, you would do nothing all your lives but wish yourselves un-noosed."

"That is not a very pleasant prospect, certainly. But, my dear aunt, you speak of Frederick Vavasour as if he were almost pennyless."

"And isn't he the next thing to it? What has he? Two hundred a-year and his commission—an ample provision, truly, for a wife and family; to say nothing of the probability of his being over head and ears in debt."

" Mr. Vavasour assures me that he is not the least in debt, and he has very good expectations."

[&]quot; From whence ?"

- " Mr. Radstock, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies, married his aunt. Mr. Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, is his own uncle."
- " Well, what of that? Will they do anything for him?"
- "He hopes so. At any rate, he trusts you will suffer our engagement to stand until he has applied to them."

To a request so reasonable, Miss Bransby could not return a negative reply; and the next day saw Frederick Vavasour on the road to the metropolis and his uncle's presence. At first, indeed, Mr. Radstock listened to his kinsman's wish to exchange the military for the diplomatic line with some complacency; for it had been his former desire that the young man should make the latter his path in life; nor did the intimation of an intended marriage appear to damp his friendliness of humour; for a confused report had reached him, that Mr. Vavasour, of the —— Dragoons, was paying his devoirs to Miss Emma Daventry; and as

Miss Emma Daventry was very well connected, her uncle being one of the Lords of the Treasury, Mr. Radstock considered the marriage likely to advance his nephew's interests, and what was to him of more consequence—his own. But when, in the course of conversation, he became aware that Frederick's dulcinea was a poor, and comparatively speaking, a low-born girl, his view of the matter underwent an entire transformation—and so did his power of advancing Frederick's interests.

"I can do nothing for you, Frederick," he said at last; "upon my life, I can't. I should be very happy to serve you, if I could; but, you see, we're overstocked—completely overstocked—nothing likely to fall in, that isn't promised over and over again. If you had followed my advice eight or nine years ago, it would have been a different thing; but now, you see, my hands are tied; I really have no interest whatever. And with regard to your

marriage, I must confess-however," said the prudent secretary, suddenly checking himself, "you're the best judge of your own affairs; and so, my dear fellow, I wish you all happiness. Pray let me know when you bring your bride to town, that I may do myself the pleasure of leaving my card. You've seen your aunt and cousins, I suppose? Not yet? Well, don't leave town without calling in Stanhope Street. Or stay, can't you give us your company at dinner? Let me see, when do I dine at home? Monday? no-Monday at Carlton House. Tuesday-Tuesday-where do I dine on Tuesday ?-Oh, I remember, with Sir William Wyndham. Wednesday?-am I engaged for Wednesday? I really can't remember. Thursday, I know, is the Duke of Whitmarsh; and Friday, Lord Liverpool. But Wednesday, I believe I may say, yes-I'm almost certain I may consider Wednesday as a blank day; so, my dear fellow, I shall reckon on seeing you in Stanhope Street at half past seven, on Wednesday next. Don't forgethalf past seven-we never wait for anybody."

Frederick Vavasour did not forget. At precisely five-and-twenty minutes after seven he was ascending the staircase of his uncle's house in Stanhope Street; and by twenty minutes to eight, he was retracing his steps, with a young lady, dressed in lilac satin, and wearing yellow roses in her hair, leaning on his arm.

No such young lady could be attractive. In fact, the whole circle assembled in Stanhope Street presented nothing which could, in any way, gratify or interest a man circumstanced as was Vavasour. As a piece of necessary politeness, his uncle had invited him to dine, and perhaps the same unpleasant duty had been performed towards the eleven individuals who, besides himself and his uncle, aunt, and cousin, composed the party.

Frederick spent a most wearisome evening, and returned to his hotel, perfectly convinced that his uncle, the Secretary, would keep his word in doing nothing on his behalf; that his marriage with Sophy Bransby was an extremely unwise proceeding; but, that as he could see nothing like Sophy Bransby—as he was desperately in love with Sophy Bransby, and Sophy Bransby with him, foolish or not, that marriage should take place.

And so he told her, when they met again.

- "And your other uncle, Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, will he do nothing? Have you seen him also?"
- "No, Sophy; I have written to him, and here is the answer to my letter."

" Dear Frederick,

"I have received your letter of the 10th. With regard to your prospect of leaving the army and taking orders, as you are your own master, and I presume old enough to decide on the course of life best fitted to your tastes and inclination, I shall forbear from offering either

advice or opinion. But I would have you bear in mind that the Church, without patronage, is a precarious profession.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"Walter Vavasour.

" Newstoke Priors, June 15th, 18-"

"But I thought," said Sophy, returning the unpromising epistle to her lover, "I thought you told me, Mr. Vavasour had considerable church patronage—that there is more than one living belonging to his property?"

"So there is; Newstoke itself is worth at least six hundred a-year, and the Yorkshire estate has a living of three or four hundred a-year attached to it."

"Then why does Mr. Vavasour talk of want of patronage? Oh, I know, he intends those livings for one of his sons."

" I hardly think so; in fact, my uncle has but one son, with whom he is not on particularly good terms."

- " What sort of man is your cousin?"
- "To say the truth, I know very little about Lionel; he has lived abroad these many years."
 - " What made him quarrel with his father?"
- "They didn't absolutely quarrel; but there was a coolness about a marriage. Lionel wanted to marry one woman, his father wished that he should marry another. As a sort of compromise, Lionel agreed to give up his love."
- " I don't think that was altogether fair in old Mr. Vavasour," interrupted Sophy.
- " Nor I, Sophy. I think my uncle was to blame for interfering; and Lionel a fool for suffering his father's interference."
 - " Perhaps he was not very much attached."
- "Or, perhaps," said Frederick, archly, "the lady proved faithless."
 - " Was that the case ?"
- " I have heard something of the sort. But I know nothing certainly, beyond the fact, that

not long after the marriage was broken off, Lionel went abroad, where he has remained ever since."

" What a strange history."

Frederick did not see anything so very extraordinary in it; nevertheless he answered:

- "There is a vein of eccentricity in that branch of the family. My uncle is certainly an eccentric man; so eccentric, that notwithstanding the manner in which he now speaks, I have very little doubt that when I have fairly taken orders he will consider one of the family livings, or perhaps both, as mine."
- " Do you really think that?"
- "I do indeed, dear Sophy; and now, the only question is, whether we shall marry before my ordination, or after—I incline to the former. What does my pretty Sophy say? Not no! surely."
 - " Frederick, my aunt Letitia-"
 - " Never mind the old girl."
 - " And my uncle?"

- " Hang him."
- "They would never consent; I am sure they would not."

"Then we will marry without their permission. You are not their child, Sophy; so if they like our marriage, well and good—if not, they must make the best of it; for marry I will, and as soon as may be, also; in spite of all relations—yours or mine."

Thus spoke Frederick Vavasour; and a great deal more he added; that is to say, he reiterated his determination so often, that Sophy was quite bewildered, and scarcely knew whether she ought to listen to him, or to her more prudent relations.

But after-consideration rather moderated Frederick's warmth. Sophia's aunt and uncle, although not wealthy, were what is called in comfortable circumstances. They had a good fifteen or twenty thousand pounds at their disposal, and when such is the case, it is inexpedient to displease.

The marriage was postponed until he should

have taken orders, and have secured, at least, a curacy.

"I must confess," observed Miss Bransby to her brother, "that every time I think of Sophy's marriage, I feel more out of humour with it; at the same time, I really don't see what can be done to prevent it."

"Why did you suffer Vavasour to dangle after Sophy?"

"He never did dangle after Sophy; at least, not that I knew of. I'm sure I always thought, everybody thought, Mr. Vavasour was paying his addresses to Emma Daventry. By the way, have you heard what a splendid marriage she is going to make? Five thousand a-year now, and ever so much more when old Brownlow dies. I declare it makes me sick to think of it; or, rather I should say, to think of Sophy's folly, going and marrying a man with next to nothing."

" She might have done better, and may still if she chooses."

[&]quot; How ?"

- "Carter would marry her to-morrow, if she would have him."
- "I beg your pardon, John; Mr. Carter would do no such thing. Sophy's been fool enough to refuse him; and, I take it, he's not the man to come forward a second time."
- "I don't know, Letty, what you may think; but I believe that if Sophy were free and would accept his hand, it would be offered fast enough. And to say the truth, that's almost the only thing which reconciles me to her engagement."
- "Well, that's the oddest reasoning I ever heard in all my life."
- "Not at all. They can't marry for some time—three or four years. Now, do you believe that anybody's constancy, man or woman's, will last as long? I don't, at any rate; and I would lay you any wager, under a guinea, that before the first twelvemonth is over, Vavasour will be tired of Sophy, even if she's not tired of him. His family, naturally averse to the marriage, will do everything to break it off;

and, in all probability, will succeed in estranging him; and Frederick Vavasour will either
say 'good bye' to Sophy, or behave in such a
manner as will ensure his dismissal; and while
she is smarting under the mortifying disappointment, what hinders our good friend Carter
from coming forward to console and comfort
her; and not ineffectually?"

Miss Bransby's eyes twinkled with satisfac-

"That's not a bad idea by any means. I dare say, John, what you say is very true, and Sophy will marry Carter after all. I hope, with all my heart, she may; if it were only to show that proud old Mrs. Daventry that our niece can get a man of property as well as her grand-daughter. And, by the way, have you heard that they are to live at Westbourne Park?"

[&]quot; Who ?"

[&]quot;The young couple; the Brownlows, I mean."

[&]quot; Indeed !"

- "Yes, they are, indeed. Just think how Mrs. Daventry will lord it over us. What airs she'll give herself, arrogant old thing! It was every bit of it her fault that Vavasour proposed for Sophy, that day. She was so intent on catching Captain Brownlow, that she never thought about the others."
 - " Do the Brownlows intend to purchase?"
- "Oh no; only to rent it. But still, you know, what a thing it will be for Mrs. Daventry to have her favourite grand-daughter living in such a place as that—just at her elbow, too. I declare, I expect she won't be endurable. I shouldn't wonder, if we were all obliged to cut her."
- "Or be cut by her. But, my dear Letty, I don't quite agree with you in thinking Mrs. Daventry will be so mightily enchanted. You know, she lays a great stress on blood, and these Brownlows have not much of that to boast of—there, Vavasour beats them hollow."
 - "Yes, he does; I must say that for him,"

replied Miss Bransby, throwing her head a little back.

"And as for the Brownlows residing at Westbourne, to my mind, it seems likely to bring as much mortification as satisfaction to the old lady. Of course, his family will be a good deal there."

"I dare say not. I'll venture to prophecy not one of them will ever set foot at Westbourne."

"Then, Letty, you run a good chance of being out in your prediction. There never was such a thing heard of as a man's living in such a place and not having his family about him, (not always, of course) it would be quite unnatural if he did not wish it."

"Aye, John, that's all perfectly true; but married men don't always get their wishes. There are such things as governing wives—we all know the story of the grey mare. Now, I'm very much mistaken, if Emma Daventry doesn't turn out something of that nature."

- " Pooh !" answered Captain Bransby.
- "Well, well, you'll see. My belief is, that it won't be very long before poor Captain Brownlow will find he's made a sorry bargain. Depend upon it, Emma Daventry, with all her liveliness and good humour, is just the woman to rule her husband. Mark my word, and if, when a twelvemonth is gone over their heads, Captain Brownlow dares to say his life's his own, I know nothing of human nature."

CHAPTER IV.

An early period was appointed for Emma Daventry's marriage, which was celebrated in London. Mrs. Daventry was invited to attend, and so was Sophia Bransby, a circumstance which gave no little pleasure to her aunt; she was pleased that Sophy should travel up to town in the honourable Mrs. Daventry's carriage: moreover, as she told her brother, it was a very desirable thing for Sophy to be in town and see all the fine wedding clothes, the jewels, the carriages, and other advantages contingent on marrying a man of property. She might, by this means, be put out of conceit with her own foolish engagement. And then it would be so pleasant to have all the particulars from an eye

witness, instead of only hearing just as much or as little as Mrs. Daventry might choose to tell.

But Miss Bransby was wrong in her calculations. Sophia's visit to London produced none of these beneficial consequences. She saw plainly enough, that, in spite of diamonds, of elegant equipages, costly dress and handsome settlements, Emma was far from happy; and worse than that, in the metropolis she met Frederic Vavasour, apparently, as much attached to her as ever; and she thought handsomer and more engaging than even formerly. Perhaps this last impression owed its birth to a suspicion, which more than once crossed Sophia's mind, to wit, that Emma, even then, would gladly have exchanged the wealthy Brownlow for the almost pennyless Vavasour.

The result of the expedition proved an increase of firmness in her adherence to the engagement; and the end of all, that, when having taken orders, Frederic Vavasour petitioned her relatives' sanction to their immediate union; Miss Bransby, wearied of hearing the matter canvassed, and seeing no chance of Sophy's doing better, for even if this marriage were broken off, what man would care to unite himself to a girl whose attachment for another had been matter of so great notoriety, gave an unwilling consent—and although Frederic had succeeded in obtaining no better preferment than the curacy of Marshampton, the wedding took place; not, certainly, with the splendour which had accompanied Miss Daventry's, but with sufficient gaiety to throw a very quiet country neighbourhood into a state of some excitement.

And, indeed, the cottage Frederic had furnished with more regard for taste than prudence, with its flower garden and paddock, and clear trout stream—its pretty, well-dressed mistress and her aristocratic looking husband, presented so complete a picture of "happiness in a small way," that even aunt Letty, for a time, was won. And very complacent, as well

as pointed, was her manner when she spoke of her nephew's excellent connexions; especially on occasions when Mrs. Daventry or Emma happened to be her auditors.

"Certainly, Frederic was far from being rich," she said;—"in respect of money, Sophy might have married infinitely better; that was no secret; everybody knew poor Mr. Carter had been distracted about her; indeed, his leaving Marshampton so immediately after her engagement was made public, proved how much in love with her he was; and Mr. Carter was a man of fortune—two thousand a-year, at the very least. At present, there was no denying, Frederic had a very narrow income—but, of course he would get on: his connexions must do something for him. Between them, there was scarcely any doubt that he would rise to the top of his profession."

And while Miss Bransby thus descanted, Mrs. Daventry would bow and cough, and allow that Frederic was an extremely handsome man; and express her fervent hope that the marriage would prove everything Mrs. Vavasour's friends could wish. And then, she would dexterously mention the new furniture at Westbourne Park, and the party of distinguished visitors her grand-daughter Emma expected; and the magnificent dresses and costly ornaments with which Captain Brownlow had presented his lady on the birth of a little girl.

But this pleasant state of things did not long endure on either side. A very few years, and the Vavasours' picturesque abode had nearly degenerated into the uninviting dwelling pourtrayed by Mrs. Daventry on her return from the pic-nic in Westbourne Park; while Emma and her husband would have afforded excellent subjects for those who delight in depicting what they consider married fashionable life. The gentleman, a sullen, disagreeable creature, who gambled, raced, drank, and seemed to care for nothing in the domestic circle, but his French man cook. The lady, an imperious

being, who scrupled not to cut his relations; when in the country had her house filled with gay and high-born (not always very respectable) people; when in town, gave dashing parties, and imitated her honoured spouse in losing sums of no diminutive amount at cards. Their little girl, they left entirely in the hands of a governess, who broke the child's spirits and well nigh destroyed her health, by the unnecessary restrictions she imposed on a disposition naturally wild with gaiety; and taught her nothing excepting to bow gracefully and carry her head upright.

So fared the ménage at Westbourne Park; and many a sigh did poor old Mrs. Daventry exhale when pondering over Emma's unhappy connexion; for Emma was unhappy in the midst of all the gaiety and glitter which dazzled those, who, looking only on the surface, would often envy Mrs. Brownlow, whose husband was so wealthy, and, above all, so exceedingly good natured.

But if Mrs. Daventry sighed over Emma's matrimonial failure, Miss Bransby absolutely groaned over Sophy's. And, in truth, it did turn out a melancholy piece of business. Mr. Vavasour, whose motives for entering the ministry had been of an entirely secular nature, proved as unfit a member of his profession as may easily be met with, short of actual immorality. Without patronage, and without talent or piety to recommend him, he remained without preferment; his temper became sour; the constant want of money taught him its value only too sensibly, and he grew miserly in habit; in principle, rapacious. Sophy's health declined; their children were delicate; in fact, as has been said before, it was a most unhappy and uncomfortable household-and any young gentleman or lady, whose heart was bent on an imprudent marriage, might have imbibed a salutary lesson by spending a couple of days at Laurel Cottage.

In all her lamentations, however, Miss

Bransby was not utterly devoid of cause for self-congratulation. First, she had told Sophy over and over again, that her marrying Frederic Vavasour would be next to insanity; and the event had proved it. Then, she had also told her, that she was totally uncalculated to be a poor man's wife; and indeed the aspect presented by the interior of the Vavasours' home bore sufficient testimony to the acuteness of her penetration.

Again, Sophy's eldest children were boys; the first-born, at any rate, a splendid specimen of juvenile human nature—while the Brownlows, who were dying for an heir, had but one little girl. And more than all, Frederic Vavasour, whatever faults he might have, and although it had been very wrong in him to possess himself of the affections of a young girl when he had not the power of maintaining her, was, nobody could deny, exceedingly attentive to her family. He did not quarrel with his wife's relations as Emma Brownlow had

done by her liege lord's; on the contrary, he always treated them, especially Captain and Miss Bransby, with the utmost consideration: indeed his deference to her was such, that she could often make him do a great deal more than Sophy could. And while poor Miss Bransby was thus lauding her nephew, it never once occurred to her that Mr. Vavasour's motives were not altogether of the most disinterested nature.

But, in the course of time, an event took place which so acerbated this good lady's feelings, that henceforth, not even Frederic's politeness availed to overcome the vexation with which she thought, and (excepting to old Mrs. Daventry) spoke of his connexion with her niece. Captain Brownlow caught a fever which proved fatal, and Emma, at one and thirty found herself a widow, with an excellent jointure, a house in Hill Street, and one little girl, whose large fortune and promise of beauty would on some future day, probably, procure

for her the enviable distinction of a titled husband. Although several years of the lease had yet to run, the establishment at Westbourne Park was immediately broken up, and in its stead a place at Roehampton engaged; for there, Mrs. Brownlow purposed spending her two years of widowhood.

Her removal was rather a relief to Sophy; for failing metal more attractive, the volatile Emma had not scrupled to amuse herself with coquetting with the husband of her early friend; and in addition to other and deeper distresses of mind, it was no trifling aggravation of Sophia's daily difficulties to listen to his commendation of the "capital dinner" of which he had been partaking, and the gay exhilarating evening he had spent at Westbourne; while she, perhaps, had been bending over the sick cradle of a wailing infant.

CHAPTER V.

"Well," said Miss Bransby, entering the room one morning with a more smiling aspect than usual; "so old Mr. Vavasour is dead."

"Yes," replied her niece; "Frederic received a letter to that effect, yesterday evening. Mr. Vavasour died on Saturday; I believe rather unexpectedly."

"I know, I know. Frederic has told me all about it; and he's invited to the funeral."

"Yes; but I hardly think he will attend."

" Why ?"

"The expence."

"Very true. But don't you think there may be some mention of him in the Will?"

"We have not heard of any. In fact, Mr.

Lionel Vavasour's letter merely states his father's death, and the day appointed for the funeral."

"Then as he does not say that there is not a legacy, we may surely hope Frederic's uncle did make some mention of him in his Will; especially as the old gentleman had not been on good terms with his son for years, and Frederic is the next heir. To say the truth, I should not be surprised-" here Miss Bransby stopped; she was not fond of making pleasant speeches; and so she would not hint to Sophy, whom it might have gratified, that which she had expressed a hundred times to Mrs. Daventry, who she imagined did not admire the theme, a favourite possibility of her'snamely, that having quarrelled with his more proximate relative, Frederic Vavasour's eccentric uncle would leave the family estate to him.

"But, at any rate," continued Miss Bransby;
"I should advise Frederic to go to Newstoke
Priors. He ought to pay his uncle's memory

the respect of attending the funeral. Besides, you know, it will be as well to make friends with the present owner, if it's only on account of the livings he will have to give away. So tell your husband from me that he really must make an exertion and go. I'm afraid he's growing indolent, and that will never do for a man who's got four children and his way to make in the world. But it's your fault, Sophy, every bit your fault; and so it will be, if he loses his cousin's good offices by not doing as I recommend. Good morning—now be sure you tell Frederic every word I've been saying."

"By the way," asked Miss Bransby, again putting her head in at the door which Sophy hoped had closed upon her for the day; "by the way, how's little William? I quite forgot to inquire about him."

"Very unwell indeed. I was up with him all last night, poor little fellow."

"Up all night? My dear Sophia, I cannot think that necessary; and it's a bad habit to get into. If a woman is not in her bed, it stands to reason she can't sleep; and without a reasonable allowance of sleep no one can be equal to the duties of the day. Some people talk of eight hours—others seven—for my own part, I never feel comfortable unless I have had seven and a half, at the very least; and if I were Mr. Vavasour, I should certainly insist upon your not depriving yourself of sleep, as, I know, you very often do, quite unnecessarily."

Sophy sighed. She might have added, "She speaks to me who never had a child." Her spirit, always a gentle one, was breaking fast.

"And what," said her aunt in a softer tone,
"was the matter with Willie? "Teeth I suppose?"

"No; Mr. Smallwood says he has a constant low fever; and that, without change of air and sea-bathing, we must not expect him to be better."

"Ah, that's exactly what all apothecaries do. Half their time they know nothing in the world of their patients' real ailments; and after they have half killed them with floods of physic, instead of leaving nature to work her own way, they recommend change of air, just to get rid of them."

"Willie is really very ill," said Sophy.

"His teeth—no doubt his teeth. It will all come right in a little time—don't fret, my dear. Nothing's so bad as fretting. You'll make yourself ill—and if you're laid up, what is to become of your family? Besides, you know, if Mr. Vavasour should have left Frederic a legacy, as is, I think more than probable, you can take part of it and go to some cheap bathing place for a few weeks."

Miss Bransby hurried off; for her conscience whispered that, as at that very moment she had seventy golden guineas lying in a secret drawer of her escritoire, besides money in her banker's hands, it was not altogether right to suffer her poor little nephew to pine for want of that she could so easily procure.

Mr. Vavasour entering shortly after, Sophy mentioned the conversation just detailed, together with Miss Bransby's opinion and advice respecting his attendance at his deceased relation's funeral.

"It's all very true, Sophy; Miss Bransby is right enough—I ought to go, if it's only to put Lionel in good humour; I see that as plain as she does. But the mischief is, that confounded money."

"Would it require much?"

"Fifteen or twenty pounds at the very least; and I declare to you that at this very moment, there are not as many shillings I could lay my hand upon."

"Perhaps, as my aunt is so very much bent upon your going, she would not refuse to advance the money," Sophy observed, after a few minutes' silence, and in a very doubtful tone of voice.

"Can't say, indeed. But I don't think it probable. She knows the value of money, that aunt of yours; and I'm very much mistaken whether, on so doubtful a security as old Vavasour's legacy, she would choose to lend such a sum as twenty pounds. At all events, I should not like to ask her."

"Nay, dearest Frederic, it is not much after all. What are twenty pounds to my aunt?"

"A great deal; I'm sure at least they are to me," said Frederic. "And I should think twice before I lent twenty, or even ten pounds to anybody. However, if you like to ask you may."

"For the sake of our children, I think we ought to propitiate Mr. Vavasour."

"Our children—yes, certainly. And, by the bye, I met Smallwood just now; his manner was very disagreeable, almost insolent—thinks it time his two years' bill was discharged I suppose. However, he must wait: there are others of more consequence than his which are not paid; nor do I see when or how they ever will be. Smallwood told me he had just been here. What did he come about?"

"Willie, I sent for him to see my poor Willie; and he says he will never be stronger, unless we can change the air."

"Yes; he said something of that sort to me, impertinent puppy. I was talking to Sir Francis Sydley when Smallwood joined me, and I've not the slightest doubt he said it just to mortify me: for if the child is dying for want of sea-bathing, and we don't take him to the sea, all the world must guess the reason."

"Dying, Frederic! Oh, surely Mr. Small-wood did not speak so seriously as that? Did he actually tell you that our sweet Willie is—is—dying?"

"No, not exactly in those words; nor am I sure he meant it. Come, hold up, Sophy; it's only my nonsense. The fact is, when Lionel Vavasour was a child, he nearly died of intermittent fever; and latterly, it has been running in my mind, that if he had, it would have been no such great loss. To his father, he was never anything but a torment; and as for us—

just think, Sophy, what a different position we should have been in at this very moment if Lionel Vavasour—however, I suppose it's not right to be making such calculations as these; so we'll say no more about it. Did you do what I asked you to my fishing line?"

"Yes, it is all ready, and the flies are in that drawer. But tell me, Frederic, do you think it probable your cousin will ever marry? I have sometimes fancied that, as he is not quite a young man—by the way, what age is he?"

"What age is Lionel? Oh, my senior, a good five years."

"Then, don't you think it just possible that he may never marry? You know he was disappointed once, and where that has been the case, it very often happens that men don't even fancy another woman. I can't help hoping sometimes that Mr. Lionel Vavasour will not marry; and then you know, Frederic, the property must come to you."

" If I outlive him; and if he doesn't take it

into his head to leave Newstoke Priors to somebody else."

"Oh, Frederic, surely he would never do that. Besides, can he?"

"There is nothing to prevent it."

"Is there no entail?"

"Nothing like one."

"Then, dearest Frederic, there is surely a still greater necessity for your propitiating your cousin, in every way. And if you wish it, I will speak to my aunt about this money; although I really think you would succeed better than I shall. You were always such an especial favourite of her's."

"Well, well, Sophy, try your influence first; and if you can't manage it, I will see what I can do." And gathering his fishing tackle together, Frederic walked off in one direction, while Sophy proceeded in another.

CHAPTER VI.

Ir was not in a light and hopeful spirit that

Mrs. Vavasour approached the formal, melancholy habitation where she had spent so many
hours of, as she then thought, weariness; but
which, as compared with her present existence,
appeared almost halcyon: and the expression
of blank surprise—the quick query as to what
could possibly be her errand, with which she
was received—served naturally to depress her
farther. It was therefore with faltering tone and
farther cheek and brow, that she at length
unfolded her request.

"What," asked Miss Bransby sharply, "what is it Mr. Vavasour wishes? That I should advance him twenty pounds? Surely I have no

heard you right. Speak louder—I must be growing deaf, I think. Godfrey, don't kick about your feet so—you'll ruin the carpet; you know it's nearly new. Sophy, you really should remember that I'm growing an old woman. Arthur, I won't have the parrot teazed. He'll bite you—there, I told you how it would be; and now I shall be deafened with the noise."

"Godfrey, take your brother out into the garden; and don't let him go too near the fish pond," said Sophy; while Miss Bransby placed her hands on her ears.

"Indeed, Sophia," rejoined the owner of the house, as her niece returned from closing the door on her offending offspring; "I must make one request, namely, that you don't bring those boys here again until they know how to behave themselves: they want management terribly—very much indeed—Godfrey especially, there's no such thing as keeping quiet; always in some mischief. Only the last time he was

here he kept pulling the gold fish in and out of the water, although I told him not, over and over again; and the consequence was, the finest of them died. I assure you, I don't believe there's a worse mannered boy in all Marshampton. He ought to go to school, and so I told his father."

"I hope we shall be able to send him soon," said Sophy, faintly.

"I hope so indeed," rejoined Miss Bransby; and a silence of some minutes succeeded; during which, Sophy calculated mentally, whether, in her aunt's present unpromising mood, there were any possible use in again reverting to the object of her inauspicious visit.

She was interrupted by her companion-

"Well, but you haven't yet explained about this money—this twenty pounds Mr. Vavasour wants me to give him. Just as if I were Queen of all the Indies!"

" No, not to give, dear aunt; only to lend."

"Lend! Yes; but he can't repay."

"But he will endeavour."

"And what's it for ?"

Sophy went over the ground once more with even less confidence than formerly. Indeed, so little hope of a successful issue did she feel, that as she spoke the concluding sentence, she gathered her shawl together and glancing towards the window, whence she could descry her boys standing on the very edge of the forbidden fish pond, rose from her seat.

She had, however, miscalculated. Miss Bransby was one of those individuals who will say unkind and ill-natured things, and yet sometimes do kind ones. And so, after nearly throwing her supplicant into a nervous fever by her cutting remarks and half refusals and assurances of the difficulty, almost impossibility, she should find in raising the unlucky twenty pounds, Miss Bransby concluded by informing Sophia, that if Frederic would call at ten o'clock precisely on the following day, he should have the money; that is to say, if she could succeed in raising it.

Frederic did call—received from Miss Bransby a twenty pound bank note, gave a regularly drawn up acknowledgment thereof, and set off, without further loss of time, for Newstoke Priors.

Certes it was not on a particularly joyful errand he was bent; nevertheless, he was in higher spirits and better humour than he had been for many months. And Sophy, while busily plying the needle, which in truth was rarely out of her fingers, could glance from the baby which slept upon her knee, to the pale languid boy who was seated at her feet, with calmness, if not with actual cheerfulness. For she and Frederic had discussed the possibility of good fortune in the form of a legacy, and of Mr. Vavasour's dying unmarried; until, being both of sanguine temperaments, they talked themselves into the firm persuasion that each of these desirable events would assuredly take place. Miss Bransby, also, who spent the greater portion of each day of Frederic's absence at Laurel Cottage, agreed in this persuasion; and so entirely did the idea fasten on Mrs. Vavasour's imagination, that at last her impatience for Frederic's return became absolutely feverishness.

There was nothing unnatural in this: the drowning man catches at straws; the unfortunate convert the feeblest glimmering of hope into the brightness of accomplished wishes.

It was already nearly dusk when Vavasour returned; but even by that uncertain light, Sophia read disappointment in his countenance; and chilled and daunted she ventured not to put a direct question. Nor did he for some time do more than inquire for herself and the children; and in reply to her greeting, inform her that he was well—quite well. He sat before the fire looking moodily into the blazing coals, and when apprized that dinner would be ready when he wished it, quickly answered, "that he had dined;" adding, after a minute's consideration that, "if not already dressed, it would be as well to keep the steak

until to-morrow." Sophy gave the necessary direction, although she was dinnerless. Then, perceiving that her husband's mood was not communicative, she began knitting in silence.

At length Frederic turned towards her and said with some asperity, "How long will it be before your aunt will expect her money?"

"Oh, Frederic, do not fret for that. My aunt will give you time, as much time as you may require. I'm confident she will. Aunt Letty has a kind heart under all her oddity; besides, she will feel as deeply disappointed as we do; for, I really believe, that her heart was as much set upon the legacy as our's."

"You know then?" Frederic returned in a hesitating tone.

"I can guess, dear Frederic."

"What?"

"Why, that—that—we were very foolish in building so much upon getting anything from your uncle."

"Yes; we were fools, indeed. However, we

shall never build again, making Newstoke Priors the foundation of our castle. It's all up with us there."

At this moment, the gleam of a lantern at their garden gate caught Sophia's eye.

"My aunt Letitia! How unfortunate!"

The next moment Miss Bransby was in the room.

- "Well, Frederic," she said, unfastening her bonnet strings, and letting her cloak fall back; "well, how much is it? Five thousand or ten?"
 - "Not a single farthing!"
- "Nothing? Pooh nonsense—you're making game of me."
- "I wish with all my heart I were. My name is not even mentioned in the Will."
 - "How shameful!"
 - "It does seem very unkind."
- "Unkind, Sophia! It's perfectly unnatural; absolutely scandalous. Although Mr. Vavasour was your own uncle, Frederic, I don't vol. 1.

hesitate to say, that he must have been a very wicked old man."

"Perhaps Mr. Lionel Vavasour will do something now, that the property is his," Sophy remarked in a mediating manner; for the increasing contraction of her husband's brow, rendered her fearful that he did not altogether approve of Miss Bransby's unceremonious manner of treating his relative.

But her remark proved anything but happy. The mention of his cousin's name evidently much augmented Vavasour's vexation; and rising hastily from his seat, he began striding up and down the little room, while his companions looked wistfully towards each other; and after a short time so spent, Miss Bransby, finding she was likely to gain no further information, although full of curiosity to hear "all about the funeral," gave Sophy a farewell pressure of the hand, and departed.

"What an old plague that woman is," said Frederic, when the door was fairly closed. "And yet I should not speak of her so slightingly: for, after all, she has been kinder to me than my own relations have. And if she would only be liberal about this confounded debt—"

"She will, Frederic; she will. I am sure, by the way she took leave of me, she will. Now don't fret about it. And even if she doesn't, you know my uncle will be at home soon, and sailors are always generous. But why do you speak so bitterly of Mr. Vavasour? Dear Frederic, what has happened? May not I know?"

"Know? Yes, if you wish it, Sophy. It's no secret now—I wish it never had been one; for then we should not have reckoned on getting Newstoke Priors, some day or other."

"Do you mean to say," inquired Sophy gasping, "that Mr. Vavasour is going to be married?"

"Worse-a thousand times worse."

[&]quot;How, my dear Frederic?"

Frederic threw himself into the chair Miss Bransby had vacated, and drawing it close to Sophy, whispered in a hoarse voice—

"Lionel is married!"

" Is married?"

"Yes; or what is the same thing, has been. His wife's dead; but there's a son—a boy about our Godfrey's age, or possibly a year or two older: and so, good bye to Newstoke Priors for us or our children."

"How strange! And how long—I mean, who was his wife?"

"Can't say, indeed."

"A foreigner?"

"Perhaps. However, it matters little who or what she was; the fact is certain. Lionel Vavasour married while in Portugal, and had this boy."

"How unfortunate!" And in spite of many efforts to restrain them, tears gathered in Sophia's eyes.

"Yes, my poor girl," said Frederic, softened

by those tokens of her disappointment, "this is rather a heavy blow; but we must make the best of it—save everything we can, and forget there is such a place in the world as Newstoke Priors."

"Doesn't it seem strange we should never have heard of this marriage? I should have thought even the papers would have mentioned it."

"Nobody heard of it. In his letters to his father, which to be sure were few enough, Lionel never mentioned that he was married: so, at least, I gathered from what I could glean from those about at Newstoke Priors; for, you know, it was not exactly a subject on which I could question my cousin."

"And when was the marriage first discovered?"

"The other day, when Lionel arrived at Newstoke Priors, bringing this boy with him."

"And he will be the heir of everything?"

"Of course."

"My poor Willie," said Sophia, "there is an end of the sea-bathing for him."

"Willie will do very well without sea-bathing. In fact, he cannot have it."

"I have a great mind to write to Mrs. Brownlow (she's staying at Broadstairs I understand) and ask her to receive Willie and me for a few weeks. Would you object to it?"

"I would rather not do anything that might publish our embarrassments, for if we do, I shall have all the tradesmen down at once upon me. However, if sea-bathing is absolutely necessary for the child, and you like to write to Mrs. Brownlow, I suppose I must not interpose my veto. But she's a worldly minded woman, who, I believe, would scarcely care to hamper herself with a cross, ailing child."

But Sophia did write—wrote humbly and affectionately, and her despatch remained unanswered. The failure of her application, however, was at the time hardly felt; for, on the day following that on which she had addressed Mrs. Brownlow, her second boy met with an accident whose consequences threatened to cripple him for life; and her anxiety respecting Willie was, for the time, transferred to his more suffering brother.

CHAPTER VII.

It was in the gladsome month of May, that Sophia Bransby became a bride—and spring flowers were budding, and spring birds were carolling when a tiny coffin occupied the spot where Willie's cot had been; and the poor mother knelt beside, and prayed that she might master her fierce grief—might bear her loss with pious resignation—that her tears, since flow they must, might only fall in secret; so that the deep and desolating sorrow which gnawed her heart away, might still not interfere with all she owed her husband and her other children.

A few months more, and Sophy's cares and griefs were over. Her death was almost sudden—such, at least, it appeared to Vavasour; he had been so accustomed to her worn, wearied look; it was so long since any colour had flushed her cheek, any animation sparkled in her eye, or any smile, but those sad, pensive ones, which spring from effort, and which wring the very heart to look upon, had played around her lips, that he could not believe her really suffering; and when, after a few hours of struggle with an ailment, trifling in itself, her spirit fled its mortal tenement, he was as one on whom the thunder stroke has fallen.

His sorrow, however, proved of short endurance. Vavasour had never been a man of deep feeling, or strong attachment; and even those affections nature had implanted in his breast had become sapped and worn away by the care and the anxieties to which his straitened means perpetually subjected him.

Two letters were discovered, after Sophia's decease. The first, addressed to her husband, was merely one of affectionate farewell, coupled with the entreaty that, should he be led to form a new alliance, he would not, in making his election, overlook how much their little Blanche's happiness and welfare would depend on the individual she must consider in the light of mother. "I speak not of the boys," poor Sophy said, "they, or at least, Godfrey will be at school, or in some profession that will take him away from Marshampton-but Blanche-my pretty, delicate Blanche, who will be always at home, it is for her I intercede; and I do earnestly entreat you, Frederic, to make her happiness a chief consideration in the marriage you will most probably contract. Oh do not, I conjure you, give the guidance of my precious child to any woman who will not act a true mother's part by her."

Vavasour wept bitterly whilst reading this letter, and solemnly protested that no one should ever occupy his lost Sophia's place. At the time, he spoke with entire sincerity; but for all that, hardly had a twelvemonth elapsed,

before it was generally rumoured and believed, that Mr. Vavasour was paying his addresses to the rich relict of a London shopkeeper. The marriage, however, never took place; why, was not exactly known. Some people said, Mrs. Bradford showed herself uncompromising respecting settlements. Others, that such objections had been raised by aunt Letty and her brother, that Mr. Vavasour trembled for the future consequences of persevering in opposing them. Others again affirmed, that on closer acquaintance with the vulgar widow, the almost expiring pride of the de Vavasours' blazed forth, and saved him from the misery so degrading a connexion would, in all probability, have entailed both on himself and his children.

Sophia's other letter was to Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors; and contained a strong appeal on behalf of her eldest boy. It proved as ineffectual as that she had addressed to Fredenic. Mr. Vavasour broke the seal, looked at the signature, read the first two lines, then threw the letter into a drawer of his writing-table.

For her poor lame boy, Sophia had made no endeavour to awaken sympathy in any quarter. "Who," she asked herself, "would care, who take an interest in a sickly cripple ?-no oneno friend on earth, at least." So she said nothing of Arthur; but she took him in her arms, and she commended him to the tenderness of Him, who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and bade the miserable cripple walk. And she prayed that, unless health should be vouchsafed him, Arthur might die. It was a wild prayer-one which breathed more of the spirit of mistrust than of dutiful submission, for her trial was severe. She knew that fathers seldom love those children, who, from mental or bodily deformity, inflict a wound upon their pride; and in imagination, she looked forward and beheld her child deformed, and ailing, and neglected. And her heart sickened at the prospect, until she wished he might rather lie beside her in the tomb.

There were two individuals to whom Sophia made no appeal on behalf of her children—her

aunt and uncle Bransby; and, perhaps from the Waywardness of human nature, these were the Only persons who evidenced any real interest towards the little orphans. The brother and sister held many colloquies respecting them; and aunt Letitia, who was ever the principal orator, well nigh wore out the Captain's stock of patience, while she related over and over again how decidedly she had always set her face against the marriage; and then, in true old maidish fashion, she expatiated on the great wickedness and selfishness shown, when people marry without the means of providing for a family. Then she remarked, with no little querulousness, that such thoughtless couples almost invariably have exceedingly large families: while others, possessing the power of providing for their offspring, very frequently have none to provide for. And further, she observed that the children of poor parents are nearly always delicate; a circumstance not to be wondered at, certainly, inasmuch as from want of proper attendance, and proper food, and proper accommodation, such children have not a common chance of growing strong and healthy; still, the fact of their being sickly, rendered the case increasingly trying, both to themselves, poor wretched little creatures, and to those on whom the burden of maintaining them might chance to fall; all which, ended in aunt Letitia's announcing her intention of taking charge of Arthur.

"He's very irritable," said her brother.

"Shockingly—does nothing but cry. However, that won't interfere with us. I mean to have the yellow bed-room put in order; you know, it stands quite by itself, at the end of that long passage. It's a good large room; and with a second door, which can easily be put up, I don't think we could hear Arthur's squalling, if he were to roar his lungs out; and, perhaps, with proper care, and good nourishing food, he may outgrow this deformity."

" I doubt it. However, Letty, I am glad,

him, for generous diet is essential in his case; and hang me, if I don't think Vavasour would make his children five upon the skin of a potatoe, if he could."

And Captain Bransby left the room to shut himself up in the library, where he commenced putting into execution his purpose of assisting his young relations, by inditing a letter to an old shipmate, whose interest he bespoke for Godfrey.

Admiral D—— answered kindly: "When old enough, young Vavasour should have a berth on board his own ship, should he be still afloat." In the mean time, Godfrey was sent to school, Miss Bransby took possession of Arthur; and Blanche, a pretty little fair creature, of about fifteen months old, who could just lisp her father's name, and crawl up on his knee, remained with Mr. Vavasour.

CHAPTER VIII.

Many years have sped away. Godfrey is second lieutenant of his Majesty's Ship, Jupiter. Arthur, despite aunt Letitia's nearly maternal solicitude, a dwarf in stature, and mediocre in mind, remains the inmate of a house now entirely her own; the gallant Captain having, on his death-bed, bequeathed all he possessed to her, with the exception of a thousand pounds to Blanche. And she, Blanche Vavasour, is grown into a very lovely girl of seventeen. Not a rustic beauty; all Sophia's latter delicacy, both of form and feature, had descended to her daughter; and there was, in addition, something of the aristocratic mien which had formerly been conspicuous in Mr.

Vavasour himself. Nor was she deficient in graceful accomplishment and intellectual cultivation.

A lady, resident at Marshampton, who had formerly moved in a far higher sphere, but the death of whose husband had reduced to poverty, for a mere trifle gladly undertook to devote some hours daily to Miss Vavasour's tuition; and Blanche proved an apt scholar. In fact, her own home was cheerless, and she was glad to spend her hours and days with her kind instructress.

Blanche's home was cheerless. With her father she was no favourite. She was the only one of his children who occasioned him expense; and that was in itself almost enough to forfeit the affection of a man over whose spirit avarice was gradually acquiring despotic and entire sway. Moreover, on one occasion, Blanche had proved the innocent cause of extinguishing a very favourite and favourable scheme of Mr. Vavasour's.

Whilst spending a few weeks alone at a watering-place, he had formed an acquaintance with a lady of fortune, who smiled when he complimented, blushed when his words were more than complimentary, and who assented, when he finally made the usual offer of fortune and hand; neither did the small proportion he possessed of the former, shake Miss Nelson's steadfastness. She was not, she said, mercenary; besides, if she had money, Vavasour had birth; and to marry a gentleman had always been a cherished hope of hers. But it was altogether different, when on discussing future plans, she learnt that he was encumbered with a family. It was not to the boys that she objected; they, it seemed, were fully provided for, and they were not likely to be much at home; but the daughter was a serious consideration. Miss Nelson did not feel she should like to undertake the charge of a little girl. She was not fond of children, did not understand them-in a word, seeing Mr. Vavasour unaccompanied by any of the members of his family, she had imagined him a single man, without children; and had she suspected otherwise, she would on no account have encouraged his acquaintance. She was really very sorry for his disappointment, and hoped they should be always friends, but she had long ago determined not to marry any man circumstanced as he was.

Mr. Vavasour, vexed at the prospect of missing so advantageous a connexion, offered every concession calculated to surmount the lady's scruples. "Blanche should be sent to school—her education must be attended to; and if Miss Nelson objected to her spending even the holidays at home, an arrangement might easily be made which would prevent it."

But Miss Nelson was resolute in her determination—the engagement was dissolved, and Mr. Vavasour returned to Marshampton, full of vexation at his recent disappointment, and highly exasperated against the cause of it.

Blanche was no object of affection with her mercenary father; and, as regarded aunt Letitia, she was scarcely more fortunate. Not that Miss Bransby was entirely devoid of interest in her beautiful young relative-far from it; in her inmost heart she was inclined to love her niece; but Arthur was Miss Bransby's favourite, and for his sake she envied the advantages, moral and personal, possessed by Blanche over her brother. Then Blanche was high-spirited. She was proud of her name-of her Norman ancestry; she brooked ill Miss Bransby's perpetual interference and assumption of authority; and still less could she bear those cutting speeches her aunt had always been accustomed to deliver.

"What if I am poor," Blanche Vavasour would say—"what if my father be, as my aunt Letitia takes such good pains to remind me, nothing but a paltry curate; is he not still a Vavasour? and am I not his child?"

Then Blanche would proudly glance towards

the genealogical tree of the de Vavasours; and her cheek would flush and her eye kindle as her thoughts reverted to the olden time; and Poetic fancy imaged tilt and tournament, and lordly hall, and lady's bower, and valiant knight, and beauteous dame, and all that bright and gorgeous pageantry which the remembrance of the days of chivalry ever presents to the imaginative mind.

For such had been her ancestors. Thus great, thus valiant, thus beautiful and good. Such was the race from which she sprung; and must she now abase herself to cringe and bow before a being so inferior as Miss Bransby?—

Never! and so aunt Letitia's admonitions were received in haughty silence, or answered in language very unlike that in which poor Sophy had been accustomed to reply; and the consequence was, that the irritated spinster grew almost to dislike her niece.

But there was one member of her family who dearly loved Blanche; and to whom she was equally attached. Her brother Godfrey; an extremely fine young man, rising in his profession, and likely one day to become one of its brightest ornaments. The brother and sister loved each other enthusiastically; and when Godfrey was at Marshampton, Blanche's gaiety was perfectly exuberant: but as he, necessarily, was but little at home, her life would have been desolate enough, had it not been for Mrs. Turner's friendship. With this lady, therefore, our heroine spent the greater portion of her time; and under her affectionate guidance, she became an accomplished and extremely well informed young woman.

CHAPTER IX.

And so Doctor W., you really think it will be essential for my daughter to lead a quiet life this spring?"

"I do, madam,—hem—I do sincerely believe—hem—that without the greatest caution —hem—this pulmonary affection—hem—of Miss Brownlow's will assume a—a—consumptive complexion."

"Oh, pray don't talk of consumption," cried Mrs. Brownlow, turning pale with apprehension; "even the possibility of Harriet's becoming consumptive terrifies me more than I can express. But surely there can't be any danger of consumption? Look at her complexion, Doctor W.—look at her figure—rather inclined

to embonpoint than otherwise. I assure you, I was once really quite fearful lest she should be too stout. Indeed, Doctor W. I cannot believe that there is the slightest probability of such a thing. Besides, after all, what is it that ails my daughter? A little short cough, a trifling tightness of breath if she happens to run up stairs or walk faster than usual."

"Yes, madam; and that little short cough, and that difficulty of breathing are the very indications of incipient disease—hem—and as for Miss Brownlow's being stout and having a high colour—hem—why, madam, if you take the trouble of looking amongst your acquaint-ance—hem—for the subjects of pulmonary disease, I'm very much mistaken if you don't find them almost invariably to have been strong, stout, healthy looking persons—hem—until the lungs became affected."

"Well, Docter W., I'm sure I don't know; I dare say you may be right; indeed it can't be otherwise; and I, of course, shall follow your prescriptions. But do you mean to shut my daughter up entirely?"

"No, not entirely. When the weather admits—hem—Miss Brownlow may take gentle exercise. A drive—a stroll—hem—or even a short ride on horseback, I should not prohibit, provided, of course, Miss Brownlow's horse be perfectly gentle—hem. She should be a great deal in the open air; but care must be taken to avoid exertion."

" And with regard to society—amusement?"

"Amusement? Oh the more of that the better. Amusement is essential—hem—in cases such as Miss Brownlow's."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. When you spoke a little while ago of a very quiet life, I was terribly afraid you meant to shut poor Harriet up altogether: and really that would be a thousand pities; for I'm told, London is expected to be more gay than usual this season. The Duke of D. intends to give a series of balls."

"Madam," interrupted Doctor W., with so much eagerness that he forgot his customary hem, "when I talked of amusement, I did not mean dissipation. And when I gave it as my opinion that your daughter should keep quiet, I meant, as any but an idiot might have seen, that balls, and evening parties of every description were out of the question. And now, I tell you, Madam, that if you take your daughter to such places, you may expect to see her in her coffin before a twelve month's over. Madam, I wish you a very good morning."

"What a brute!" exclaimed Mrs. Brownlow, ringing the bell violently; and the sentiment was fully echoed by her daughter when Doctor W's fiat was imparted to her. And it is very possible, that neither Mrs. nor Miss Brownlow would have, in any measure, followed Doctor W's most objectionable prescriptions, had not another eminent physician, consulted in the expectation of obtaining a more palateable verdict, strenuously advocated the

system proposed by his brother Esculapius. "All dissipation must," he said, "be avoided; at the same time, Miss Brownlow's mind should be amused:" and to procure amusement for a mind debarred the usual means of gratification, Mrs. Brownlow found an exceedingly difficult matter. Books were tried, and music, and morning visitors admitted; but Harriet's spirits drooped. She had never cared for reading: instrumental music (all other was prohibited) wearied her: and as for morning calls, she absolutely hated them. No one worth seeing ever offered to come in-and then, for a prisoner such as she was, could anything be more provoking than to hear every body talking of the amusements from which she was so cruelly shut out?

Miss Brownlow was low and fretful; and her mother in great perplexity: for she was well aware that the amusement recommended by Doctor W., and seconded by Doctor M. was quite as needful for her daughter's peace of mind as for her bodily health; and Harriet, who read her mother's thoughts, and had moreover an object of her own in view for not endeavouring to overcome her dejection, gave way to it entirely.

"What shall I do for my poor Harriet?" inquired Mrs. Brownlow of an old and intimate acquaintance; "I'm sure I devote myself to her; never leave her for an hour, if I can help it; and yet, in spite of all my efforts, there she goes moping about the house, and sighing as if her heart was breaking. She, who used to have such delightful spirits—I declare, it makes me almost wild to see her. Do, my dear Lady Frampton, tell me, what would you advise? How would you act in such a case?"

Lady Frampton recommended a companion of Miss Brownlow's age. "Young people," she remarked, "require the society of those whose tastes and habits are congenial with their own, and this can only be where there exists a similarity of years. The young may amuse the old, but the old can never entertain the young.' And Mrs. Brownlow considered the suggestion better than it was easy to act upon.

Harriet Brownlow had doubtless many young lady friends, but who amongst them would be willing to remain a prisoner, relinquish the gaieties of a London spring? For if this were not done, of course Harriet's dissatisfaction and ennui would be increased instead of lessened. At length, Mrs. Brownlow remembered Blanche Vavasour, and after a few minutes' consideration, she became perfectly amazed that she had never thought of her before. Some months back the Brownlows had been staying at Westbourne, when Harriet had taken a fancy to Blanche, and had even asked her mother to let her go with them to the sea. At the time, Mrs. Brownlow had objected, for Godfrey was at home and apparently excessively inclined to play the gallant by the pretty heiress, whose prudent mama, therefore,

deemed any increase of intimacy with his family greatly to be deprecated.

But no such danger existed now; Godfrey was at sea, and according to the public prints, the Jupiter was not likely to be at home again for some time. In this respect, therefore, Mrs. Brownlow felt no apprehension; and with regard to Miss Vavasour's wish for dissipation, she was equally at ease. It was very unlikely that a girl brought up as Blanche had been would entertain the least desire for London gaiety. She would be perfectly happy to stay quietly at home with Harriet. Thus, Harriet would be provided with a companion of her own age who would be entirely subservient to her wishes, willing to converse or to be silent, to walk or to ride; in short, to do exactly whatever Miss Brownlow might chance to fancy.

And it would be a great advantage to Blanche to spend some weeks in town; she might have any masters her father chose to

give her, provided, of course, Harriet's comfort was not interfered with; and she would gain fashion-air-acquaintance with the world-The benefit would be mutual-a circumstance on which Mrs. Brownlow dwelt with very great complacency; for in the midst of all her thoughtlessness and worldliness of spirit, there would sometimes come across her remembrance the memory of a time when her heart was true and her affections warm, and when Sophia Bransby had been the trusted friend and the favourite associate. She had been greatly shocked on hearing Sophy's death; and when, in that moment of contrition, the letter she had not even answered came before her, Emma Brownlow solemnly pledged herself to further, as far as in her power lay, the weal of her deceased friend's children.

The resolution, certainly, was not adhered to; indeed it was forgotten almost as soon as formed. But now, when uneasiness on her own child's behalf had again sobered a character too volatile by nature, and rendered still further selfish and inconsiderate by a marriage which forced her to trample better feelings under foot, and to seek in the glitter and excitement of a life of gaiety and dissipation some compensation for the trials and vexations of an unhappy home, Mrs. Brownlow felt glad to believe, that in providing Harriet with a desirable companion, she would confer a benefit on Blanche.

The scheme delighted Harriet; and a letter was immediately despatched to Marshampton, inviting Miss Vavasour to spend as many weeks in town as she herself might wish, or her father judge expedient.

CHAPTER X.

LET not my readers imagine that the indiidual thus distinguished, experienced any ecsatic feelings of delight on receiving the comnunication; quite the reverse—Blanche felt so
satisfied of the impossibility of Mr. Vavasour's
consenting to any scheme involving such an
expenditure as her journey to London and
residence there must occasion, that her first
impulse was a determination of answering th
letter quietly, without even referring it to him.
But candour prompting an opposite course
after carelessly mentioning the circumstance,
she placed Harriet's epistle in her father's
hands.

He read it leisurely throughout, although it

was crossed and written in a true young lady's hand; then, having folded it with the utmost nicety returned it to his daughter without a single syllable of comment; excepting indeed an indistinct murmur between his teeth which sounded a little like "Nonsense."

"I am not to go," thought Blanche. And now that the matter was entirely decided, she began to wish the issue had been otherwise.

"Shall I give any message from you to Mrs. Brownlow, papa?" she asked, after a few minutes' silence.

"Message from me? No, to be sure not. What should I have to say to Mrs. Brownlow? Excepting, perhaps, to thank her for her kindness to you. Although, to say the truth, I don't see any such mighty great obligation in proposing what she knew to be impossible."

"Impossible?—How impossible?"

"For the best reason in the world—that it is impossible."

"Papa," said Blanche smiling, "that sounds a little like a woman's mode of reasoning." "Does it indeed?" he retorted tartly. "Then for once, a woman may be supposed to reason sensibly and according to what is true. However, in this particular instance, I'm rather inclined to think that a woman would have argued very differently; for the reason your visit to the Brownlows is impossible, is simply this—that you can't get to London without money, and it's not a trifle either, that you'd find necessary. Now that's an argument no female ever can be made to comprehend. Whatever a woman sets her heart upon she thinks must, and can be done, let the expence be great or small; and if her wishes are not gratified, a fit of discontent and sullenness succeeds."

"What reason shall I give to Harriet for declining the invitation?"

"Any you choose. That you don't wish to leave Marshampton; or, if you like it better, that I can't spare you."

"Papa, I would rather say the truth, and tell Harriet you cannot afford the expence of my going to town; there is surely no disgrace in poverty."

Perhaps Mr. Vavasour felt such an admission would prove as widely distant from veracity as either of the motives he had alleged; for he looked exceedingly displeased, so much displeased, that Blanche for once was glad to see her aunt Letitia's straw bonnet and drab shawl appear and disappear between the lilacs and Guelder roses which screened their cottage from the road.

A few minutes afterwards, however, she altered her opinion. Miss Bransby's sharp grey eye instantly caught Harriet Brownlow's letter; and forthwith ensued a variety of queries which naturally elicited the object of the missive.

"Ah," said Miss Bransby, "indeed. Well I must say it's very kind in Mrs. Brownlow; and more than I should have expected from her—a great deal more. Pray, when do you go, Blanche, my dear; and how do you me her to travel, Mr. Vavasour? Not by

stage, of course. At Blanche's age that would be most improper. Besides, Mrs. Brownlow would not approve of it; before her servants it would look so odd to see a girl like Blanche tumbling out of a vulgar stage coach, and in the streets of London, too. When people are staying in other people's houses, they must consult their wishes—so I conclude she will travel post, and the thing will be to find some one to share the expence and prove a sort of chaperone—unless, indeed, you think of taking your daughter to town yourself, Mr. Vavasour; which would be, perhaps, the most desirable plan."

"Not I, indeed," growled Mr. Vavasour.

"Well then, we must look out for some one else. Now I think of it, my maid said something yesterday about Mrs. Barnet's wanting to go to London; and she might do for Blanche's escort, if you don't mean to go yourself. She's not a very genteel sort of person to be sure, but she's perfectly respect-

able and trustworthy; and, of course, as she wants to travel up to town, she would not hesitate about sharing the expence with Blanche. If you like it, Mr. Vavasour, I will go and make inquiry."

" Pray don't give yourself that trouble; my daughter has no intention of leaving Marshampton-or, perhaps, I should say, I have no intention she should go," said Mr. Vavasour, in so determined a tone, that Miss Bransby. who had hitherto favoured the scheme simply from the idea that it would prove advantageous to her niece, thenceforward adhered to it from the spirit of opposition, quite as much, if not more, than from her former impulse. And the altercation grew so very animated, that Blanche fled from the scene of action, and took refuge in her room; where, seated near the open window, she listened, not to the carolling lark, nor to the thrush's deep rich note, but to the shrill tones of her aunt Letitia's high pitched voice, every word becoming all but distinguishable in the room above, as that lady's excitement strengthened. And well knowing the effect Miss Bransby's interference would inevitably work upon her father's temper, Blanche did most sincerely wish that Harriet had never thought of asking her to London:—and still more that her aunt Letitia had postponed her visit.

At the expiration of about half an hour, Miss Bransby entered Blanche's room, and flinging herself into a chair, untied her bonnet and threw it off with such energy that cap and even wig were equally discarded, their quondam wearer appearing all the time perfectly unconscious of their loss. Her cheeks were scarlet—absolutely scarlet—and her eyes gleamed and glistened; in fact, looked so exactly like two fragments of lighted coal, that it seemed really wonderful she did not cause a general conflagration by setting fire to everything she came in contact with; especially as her incessant panting would have materially aided the combustion.

Blanche thought her aunt Letitia's brain must be affected; and repressing an incipient smile, presented a glass of water. With an air of gravity not unmixed with pride, Miss Bransby waved it from her; for in spite of all these signs of discomposure, Miss Bransby had achieved a victory.

There is a certain war in which women always do come off victorious—the war of words—and one material reason of our triumph is, that we are more cunning than our masculine antagonists. Miss Letitia's victory, however, was not entirely the fruit of craft. Regard to the possible ulterior consequences of her displeasure had influenced her opponent to the full as much as her eloquence; although she did dwell, and not slightly, on the probability of Miss Brownlow's marrying a man with church patronage at his disposal, as a powerful inducement for encouraging an intimacy between Harriet and his daughter.

" Well, Blanche, I have settled the matter

with your father; not very easily, however, I can tell you. I never met with such an obstinate, unmanageable creature in all my life as he is. So stingy, too; as for his laying out money, I declare I think he would as soon part with his heart's blood, or with some of those white teeth your poor mother used to be always admiring, and that he was so fond of showing. I told her, over and over again, that it was only to show his teeth, Mr. Vavasour smiled, and not because he was good tempered, as she, poor foolish girl, would think. Good tempered, for sooth !- I wish you could have seen the passion he put himself into just now, because I ventured to tell him I thought it his duty to do something more for you than just feed you as he would a dog, and dress you like a charity girl. I assure you, I could hardly help getting a little warm myself; and even now, I feel quite nervous and excited. However, I've gained my point; you're to go to town with Mrs. Barnet, and I'm to pay your journey up; you'll come

back, of course, with the Brownlows. If you don't, your father must hand out the money, for I can't."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Blanche, approaching her relative, and forcing herself to proffer the caress she considered a necessary requital for Miss Bransby's friendly offices.

"Yes, Blanche, you may well be obliged to me, for I've gone through a fine scene with your father. But there's no use talking about it; only I must say, I feel it rather hard, that as I never had a family myself, I should be for ever in hot water about other people's children. There's your cousin, Mary Hyndley—I had a letter from my sister only this morning—Mary Hyndley's going to be married."

" Indeed !"

"Yes, indeed, she's going to be married; and because it's a foolish, ridiculous marriage she's making (only six hundred a-year) they expect me to furnish the wedding clothes, or, at least, part of them." " Mary marries Mr. Purcell, I suppose?"

"Yes, Mr. Purcell, a clerk in one of the government offices, with six hundred a-year. Quite an absurdity her marrying him-nearly as bad as the Vavasours, as I told my sister; and talking of Mary Hyndley's wedding-clothes, puts me in mind of yours, Blanche. You will want good dress, and plenty of it, if you go to London; but really, your father must provide that, and you must speak to him about it yourself, for indeed I can't. But, eh-what-what's happened to my head? and where-where's my wig?-and my bonnet, and my cap? Where, in the name of wonder, are they all? I protest, your father must have knocked them off! I thought I felt something very like a blow! Blanche, for goodness' sake, run down and find them for me; but stay, shut the window first, I shall catch my death of cold. What are you laughing at, Miss?-Go, this instant, and do as I desire you."

But, instead of leaving the room, which, in

in order that her risable faculties might haves full play, she risable faculties might haves ordered head-dress, with as much gravity as its was possible to muster.

before the looking-glass, that she might repaired the mischief: "caught in my flounce, I suppose. Well, I must say, I should never have imagined that Frederic Vavasour would conduct himself in such an ungentlemanlike way assethis. I protest, I do believe, I might bring him in guilty of an assault. But he was in such a passion, I don't think he knew either what he did, or what he said."

- " I fancy it was an accident, and not papa's ill manners," said Blanche, smiling.
- " An accident, indeed! A very likely thing. Pray, how could I have done it?"
- " When first you came into this room, you took off your bonnet, and the rest of your head-dress came with it."

- "Nonsense, child; your father knocked it off—I know he did. I tell you I felt the blow quite plain. However, it's all right again, now'; and I can only hope I haven't caught the rheumatism; for I'm rather too old to be sporting an uncovered head, like a girl of sixteen," aunt Letty replied, looking half amused, in spite of all her previous indignation.
- "You won't say anything to papa about it?"
 - " About what?"
 - " About the accident to your bonnet?"
- "Oh, no. There's no use in talking about it. Your father would never condescend to apologize. Indeed, I dare say he would declare he did not knock my bonnet off, although I am satisfied he did. But he would never allow it. In fact, you know, my dear Blanche, your father is one of those people, who, if once they take a fancy into their heads, not all the talking in the world can put it out; so I shall say nothing of Mr. Vavasour's extraordi-

nary conduct this morning; more particularly, as in general, he never treats me with any want of proper respect and attention—quite the reverse, I must say that for him. I think, Blanche, you had better not mention it, either. Good bye—I'm going now to inquire about Mrs. Barnet's plans."

They were quickly ascertained. Mrs. Barnet wanted particularly to go to London; she was desirous, also, of taking one of her little boys with her, and being a good natured as well as sufficiently liberal minded individual, she professed herself delighted to be escort to Miss Vavasour, and quite willing, in considetion of the aforesaid little boy, to pay two thirds of the travelling expenses.

CHAPTER XI.

Pass we over the many discussions between her aunt and father occasioned by Blanche's visit to the metropolis; and let us imagine her seated in a postchaise beside a smiling, good tempered looking dame, who was all anxiety to accommodate Miss Vavasour and Miss Vavasour's paraphernalia. The latter was not particularly easy; as, despite her oft repeated assurance that for no expense beyond the journey to London, would aunt Letitia become answerable, she had provided Blanche with really an exceedingly handsome, well selected wardrobe.

Pride, rather than affection, was the mainspring of Miss Bransby's generosity; and, therefore, as far as concerned the recipient, nothing could be more ungracious than the manner of the gift. And it was also vastly inconvenient: for, hoping Mr. Vavasour would perform his undoubted duty by his daughter, and thus absolve her from the necessity of drawing further on her resources, the prudent old lady delayed her acts of generosity to as late a period as possible; and, in consequence, long after Blanche's trunks were closed, fresh packages of every sort kept pouring in; and even on the very morning of her departure two band boxes were added to a list, which, if Blanche had happened to have had a male companion would have driven him half mad.

If Master John Barnet had accompanied his mother according to her original intention, he would have run some chance of being suffocated; but happily for all parties, only the night before their departure he manifested symptoms of a trifling childish malady, which induced his mama to leave him at Marshampton,

Blanche shed no tears on leaving the paternal roof as heroines are wont to do; on the contrary, she gaily kissed her hand to her aunt Letty, who she descried standing en robe de chambre at the window of her sleeping room: and as the morning was delicious, and the air all balm and fragrance, she would have enjoyed the journey exceedingly had her companion been less anxious to accommodate her; and still more, less loquacious. But Mrs. Barnet was a thorough paced gossip; moreover, in common with all individuals of her class in life, she cherished the ill-grounded opinion, that talking and entertaining are identical. Again-like all other vulgar people, she contrived to make herself, her family, and her concerns, the unvarying theme of her discourse.

I don't know why it is, but under-bred people are almost invariably egotists, and full of self-sufficiency. At least, I never chanced to meet with any who were not. From the artisan to the would-be lady, or gentleman, they

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are all in this respect alike. Perhaps, a happy circumstance for those who have their way to make in life—for without self-sufficiency, and not a little of it also, there is but slender chance of rising in this world.

The day sped on. Mrs. Barnet having, to her companion's infinite relief, dropped into a gentle slumber, Blanche opened a book with which she had provided herself, and began reading: not, however, for long. It was pleasanter to muse; to picture to herself the people she was going amongst; the life she was to lead; and to speculate on what might, or might not, occur during her stay in town.

Do my readers fancy that any matrimonial probability obtained a place in Blanche's meditations? If so, they are mistaken—utterly mistaken. Blanche was too young and too unworldly, perhaps, too delicately minded, to fix her thoughts on any such contingency. Still, I must confess, Blanche did erect one airy tenement which was not without its male inhabi-

tant. It has been said that she was proud, proud of her family, proud of the name of Vavasour; and this exultation did not only hallow that which was past. There existed at this very period one Vavasour, whom her ardent imagination owned in all respects worthy the long ancestral line he would one day represent. Edward—the identical individual whose unexpected appearance had, on a former occasion, caused such imminent disappointment and chagrin to the father and his gentle wife.

Blanche had never seen Edward; but in her mind she knew him perfectly. Even at Marshampton, that quiet, secluded place, people talked of the member for D. She had read his speeches—manly, sensible, energetic, they appeared to her precisely such as a man of independent principle and patriotic feeling ought to deliver. In truth, his oratory was of the very highest order, and marked by all that vast variety which usually denotes the richly gifted mind. At one moment, the wild

and meteor gleam of wit was flashing there; then came the lofty flight of fancy; then the commanding stroke of power; the touch of thrilling tenderness. Grandeur and simplicity; pathos and strength; grace, fervour, earnestness, vivacity and depth, each in their turn prevailed; and joined to magical persuasiveness and all the witching charm of well selected language won the hearer's smile, or caused histears to flow, or hurried him along, dazzled_enraptured, overcome.

Thus had it fared with Blanche. She had read her cousin's speeches; had studied, mused over them, until her eager spirit caught a portion of the fervour which inspired him, and all his feelings and opinions became hers. A dangerous link, and yet, how full of fascination is that sympathy which knits mind to mind.

Blanche was dreaming; and her vision ran on the probability that, in the metropolis, she might meet and become acquainted with her gifted relative, when the pleasant reverie was rudely dissipated by a sudden jolt of the somewhat crazy vehicle in which she sat. The shock which startled Blanche, awakened Mrs. Barnet.

"My stars!" cried the latter, "what has happened? Why goodness, gracious me, I declare if the horses aren't jibbing, and we shall be all upset. Postboy—postboy—by, what can you be about? What did you leave your horses for? Don't you see, we're colling down the hill as fast as ever we can

"Don't put your head out-pray keep your seat," exclaimed Blanche.

"Postboy—let us out—let us out—I insist upon it, that you let us out."

But the postillion turned a deaf ear to Mrs. Barnet's adjuration. In fact, had he wished to release the inmates of the carriage—an act of mercy servants always shew the greatest reluctance in performing—it would have availed nothing. The horses having once given way, it became impossible to arrest the speed with which their burden rolled backwards, until a

high bank put a period to this unpleasant manner of proceeding.

The carriage, although not overturned, was too much injured to be any longer safe; and the travellers, having recovered their alarm, debated the expediency of proceeding to the nearest town on foot, while the postillion staid behind in charge of the luggage; or of their remaining for that purpose, whilst he rode forward.

"I'm sure, Miss Vavasour," said Mrs. Barnet, "I don't know what will be best for us to do; I never was in such a perdicament before in all my life. And as for saying which will be safest and most proper—I declare I haven't a notion. To think of walking six or seven miles in all this burning sun would be no ways agreeable; besides, who can tell what mightn't happen by the way? What with the trampers and all the idle vagrants that's sure to be upon the turnpike road, I shouldn't consider it safe by any means for females to walk so far without the protection of a gentleman. Then again, if we send the boy on whilst we

stay here to watch the luggage, why, you know, Miss Vavasour, that wouldn't be any better."

- "Might we not walk as far as the next turn-Pike?" asked Blanche.
 - " How far is that, my lad?"
- "The next pike?" replied the boy, touching is hat; "why, 'tis a matter of two miles, at least—and he's a surly chap as keeps it."
 - " Dear me, what shall we do—what will be-
 - "Better 'bide here," said the postboy. "The coach will be going by in half an hour or so, and very like they won't be full."
 - "At any rate, we can send a message by it,"
 Blanche observed; and Mrs. Barnet acquiescing in the wisdom of the plan, they seated themselves in a shady spot, and most impatiently awaited the arrival of the —— stage.

In about twenty minutes, the vehicle appeared, trotting briskly down the hill.

" Dear," cried Mrs. Barnet, "how those coaches do drive? Going at that rate down such

a hill as this. I'm afraid they won't be able to pull up and take us in. Coachman! coachman!—don't you see we're waiting to be taken up? We want to go to R——"

But the coach was full inside and out; the coachman merely shook his head, and rattled past.

"Humph—he might, at any rate, have asked if he couldn't do anything to help us. What a surly, ill-natured fellow! And all those men upon the top—gentlemen, I suppose they'd call themselves—not much of that, however, or they wouldn't have let him drive by and leave two ladies in such a perdicament as this. Well, dear Miss Vavasour, what shall we do? What will become of us? I declare I'm getting quite flustered—it's growing late; and you know it would be dreadful if we should be obligated to stay here all night. Oh, here comes something else—perhaps that will do for us. I'm sure, if it were only a butcher's cart, I shouldn't mind going in it."

But it was not a cart, but a sober-looking, old-fashioned chariot, without armorial bearings, or even cypher to announce the owner's name or quality, and occupied by a single individual, who having ordered his driver to stop, beckoned the postboy of the disabled carriage; and on learning the state of the case, desired the ladies might be informed that, provided they did not object to retracing their steps, such accommodation as he could offer, lay at their disposal.

The proposal being joyfully received, its originator alighted from his carriage, and with a degree of politeness, bordering upon stiffness, assisted Blanche into the conveyance.

He was a man of, apparently, about sixty, or sixty-five years of age; sallow in complexion, spare in form, and of stooping gait. He wore a brown scratch wig, a brown coat, and a striped waistcoat, the prevailing hue of which was also brown, all of rather coarse material, and certainly none of Stultz's tailoring. Yet he looked like a

gentleman; and that he possessed the power of discriminating between plebeian and patrician, was manifest in the surprise he evidently felt, when Mrs. Barnet, smiling, curtseying and reiterating her acknowledgments of his politeness, followed Miss Vavasour into the chariot. He, undoubtedly, believed her to be merely an attendant, and as such, expected she would seat herself upon the coachbox; but, as she chose the interior of the vehicle, there remained no other part for him, but to make the most of the circumscribed space that was left for his accommodation.

Blanche guessed the tenour of the stranger's thoughts; and, vexed at causing so much inconvenience, withdrew herself as far as possible into the corner of the carriage.

"Thank you, my dear Miss Vavasour, thank you kindly," said Mrs. Barnet, spreading herself out; "pray don't discompose yourself. You needn't crowd so, I've plenty of room—plenty, indeed. Now don't make yourself uncomfortable. I hope I'm not crowding you, Sir; I'm

not exactly the most suitable figure in the world for sitting bodkin. But I can manage very well.

Besides, it's only for a little while, we shall soon be at R—. I believe, Sir, it's towards R——you're going?"

The elderly gentleman raised his eyes from a volume he had opened immediately upon eir setting off.

"I believe, Sir, you're going to R---?"

peated Mrs Barnet.

"I purpose dining and sleeping at Cross Ferry," he answered shortly.

"Cross Ferry! dear me—why that isn't even on the London road!" Mrs. Barnet exclaimed, in a tone of great disappointment; while Blanche endeavoured to restrain her—but in vain.

The old gentleman resumed his studies, and Mrs. Barnet continued descanting upon their accident, its cause and consequences, with their infinite obligation to their new acquaintance. An obligation, however, evidently much low-

ered in the speaker's estimation, by the necessity it entailed of their forsaking the regular road to the metropolis. For Mrs. Barnet's mind was fully impressed with the conviction, that proper and convenient accommodation might only be obtained on the high London road. Blanche, in a low voice, sought to dispel her uneasiness, but Mrs. Barnet would not be convinced. She was, she said, an old traveller, Miss Vavasour a young one, and it stood to reason she must know best.

Every syllable Mrs. Barnet uttered, increased our heroine's annoyance; for she observed that the old gentleman, although ostensibly engrossed in reading, was, in reality, listening; and it was, surely, very unpleasant to have each individual circumstance connected with her journey, as well as with her name and that of all her immediate relations, thus offered, rather I should say, intruded on the notice of a perfect stranger. She was thankful when they reached Cross Ferry, where, on inquiry,

they found they could be accommodated with a sleeping-chamber, but nothing further. The inn, one of an inferior description, was unusually full, in consequence of some county meeting.

"Well," said Mrs. Barnet, looking round,
this double bedded room will do well enough;
d I dare say we shall find everything more
mfortable than I expected, although it is
uch a pokey-looking place, and quite off the
london road. But, I declare, I don't think
there's a bell; I dare say, Miss Vavasour,
you'll be glad of something to take after all
our fright. I protest, I feel perfectly exhausted."

"I should be thankful for a little hot water," said Blanche. "These dusty roads leave tokens of remembrance one would gladly get rid of."

"Yes; my hair looks, for all the world, as if I had tumbled, head foremost, into a meal-tub —never saw such a figure in my life." And Mrs. Barnet put her head out of the door, and called, "Chambermaid, chambermaid!" but finding the summons perfectly unheeded, she walked into the passage, and leaning over the banisters, repeated the appeal with infinite increase of vociferation. Then, as no chambermaid appeared, Mrs. Barnet betook herself to the lower regions, where she remained a full quarter of an hour.

She returned, bearing in her hand a jug of boiling water, and on her countenance, a very complacent smile. "Well, Miss Vavasour," she said, "I'm come back at last. I hope you haven't been nervous while I was away. Dear me! who's that? a gentleman—how very impertinent to be coming poking his head into a lady's bed-room, in that way. I suppose we must lock the door."

"I'm afraid we can't," said Blanche; "I tried just now, but in vain. A most unlucky circumstance, for it seems the next room is occupied by this committee; and I suppose the members mistake between the doors."

"Bless me! But that's a very awkward piece of business-especially if we can't manage to fasten our's. We shall be having them popping in and out every minute. And I find we havn't a chance of a sitting room; that old brown gentleman (my dear Miss Vavasour who can he be?) has taken possession of the only one at liberty. However, it's of less consequence than it might have been, for I hear that the landlady's cousin married a sort of relation of mine -Susan Wally-my maiden name was Wally -and her husband lives in Cross Ferry, keeps a large chemist and druggist's shop. They're very genteel people, though; indeed, he practises as an apothecary. Well-they're settled here; and very fortunate it is for us; for Susan and I were schoolfellows, and I know she'll be uncommon glad to see me or any friend of mine to drink tea, or even to dine, for they're very hospitable people. So, my dear Miss Vavasour, as soon as we've tidied ourselves,

we'll just step down to Susan's. "Tisn't five minutes' walk, I'm told."

Blanche was much perplexed by this proposal: it was one, she felt it would be quite impossible to accept, and nearly as difficult to refuse; and while hesitating for a reply, the door of the chamber once more opened, and their hostess curtsied herself into the room. She was the bearer of a message from "the gentleman in Number 2." In fact, the elderly man who had been already so useful to our travellers. "The gentleman in Number 2, presented his compliments to Miss Vavasour, and hearing she was unprovided with a sitting room, begged she would do him the favour of sharing his."

Blanche would have answered in the negative—but her companion instantly acceded; and before she could recover her surprise, Blanche heard the landlady's high-pitched voice informing the occupant of Number 2, that Miss Vavasour sent her respects and would be very happy to wait upon him.

"Mrs. Barnet," said Blanche, "I really cannot. It appears to me scarcely decorous to accept such an invitation from an entire stranger."

"Bless your heart, my dear young lady, what impropriety can there be in it? why the Sentleman's old enough to be your grandfather. And if you don't like dining alone with him, I'm willing to make a third, or to do anything else that would make you comfortable; that I am, I'm sure. And you needn't be afraid of disappointing me about Susan Wally, for we can easily step down there for half an hour between dinner and tea; and, perhaps, that will be the best plan after all."

It did not appear to Blanche that the presence of her good-natured companion would increase her comfort; and she was still debating between a visit to the Wallys, her acceptance of the stranger's hospitality, or continuing to occupy a room, the door of which it was impossible to fasten, when the landlady returned and informed her that "the gentleman's dinner was on the table, and that he was only waiting for Miss Vavasour."

Feeling it useless any longer to demur, Blanche pointed the landlady's attention to the fastening of the door; and then adopted the alternative, apparently, the least objectionable.

The old gentleman in Number 2 received her with a smile; which, however, gave place to an expression of astonishment on perceiving Mrs. Barnet, who, without allowing Miss Vavasour to speak a single syllable, commenced a string of thanks for this fresh proof of politeness. He bowed stiffly, and motioning Miss Vavasour to the head of the table, took his place opposite.

No cover had been laid for a third person; a deficiency, which, for a moment, damped Mrs. Barnet's volubility: but silence was not her nature. In a few minutes, therefore, she regained her customary ease; and talked, and ate, and laughed with infinite alacrity. Blanche's colour heightened every moment.

There is nothing which betrays ill-breeding so readily as the mode of despatching food. The manner in which a man eats his dinner is almost a certain test of his gentility; and if poor Mrs. Barnet had not evinced much title to good anners while occupying the middle seat of e stranger's carriage, now at his dinner table er vulgarity was infinitely more conspicuous. She put her knife into her mouth; bit her bread; used her spoon instead of her fork; drank beer; ate cheese; discovered a voracious appetite, although in truth, the viands were not of the most tempting order; called the broiled fowl, beautiful; said that the trout were loves; and quite forgetting she was herself an uninvited, and far from welcome guest, completely did the honours of the table.

Great was Blanche's satisfaction when the meal was concluded, and she perceived symptoms of withdrawal on her fellow traveller's part.

"Well, Miss Vavasour," said the latter, "how do you feel about a walk? Some people dislike moving soon after eating; don't consider it wholesome. For my part, I always find that a good shake after dinner does me a world of good; and so, if you don't object, we'll just step down and see my cousins. I'm sure, Sir, we're very much obliged to you, very much, indeed: and, I dare say, you won't be sorry to have your room to yourself for a bit. May be it's your custom to take a nap after dinner."

The old gentleman looked at Blanche; she fancied, very meaningly.

"I am not in the habit of sleeping after dinner; and even if I were, I should regret that Miss Vavasour thought it necessary to leave this room on that account."

Blanche resumed her seat.

"You're tired, my dear; well then, you'd

better keep quiet. Ah, Sir, the young people now-a-days haven't half the staminay we used to have. 'Tis all along of the education, and not giving children enough to eat. Besides, what they do get, hasn't any nourishment in it. They all overwork their minds too much, and don't support nature in other ways. One hears nothing now but diet, diet, diet-learn, learn, learn-as I was telling our apotecary the other day, when my Charlie had a fit of indigestion, because he ate too much roast pork and onions, and I was forced to have the doctor for him," said Mrs. Barnet; whilst Blanche cast her eyes upon the ground, and their entertainer walked over to the window, where he remained some minutes, even after the speaker withdrew, which she did almost with her concluding sentence.

At length, turning quickly towards Miss Vavasour, he asked—

" Have you neither father nor brother?"

Blanche could scarcely forbear smiling. So much and often had Mrs. Barnet discoursed about her family, that she imagined every individual of it must be perfectly well known to her interrogator.

" I have both," she answered.

"Then why do you travel without a proper escort?"

Blanche felt herself entitled to resent this query from an acquaintance of a few hours only. But there was something in the stranger's manner which repelled her rising displeasure. It seemed as if he had been prompted neither by impertinence nor curiosity, rather by a sentiment of interest: and after a little hesitation, she replied—

"One of my brothers is a cripple; the other is at sea."

"And your father?"

"My father considered Mrs. Barnet sufficient protection; and excepting for the accident which befel our carriage, his opinion might not have been devoid of justice."

"He should have travelled with you himself." "My father is not wealthy," rejoined Miss Vavasour—and then she stopped—for with all her lofty mindedness, and Blanche was a high-hearted being, she could not avow her father's poverty without some sense of shame.

Perhaps her companion pitied the embarrassment he had occasioned; for after looking at her with much earnestness for a few seconds, he relapsed into that silence which, in truth, appeared his most congenial mood. It was broken by another abrupt and singular interrogation.

"Pray, are you reckoned like your mother?"

"I have been told that I am like mama; at least, like what she was during the latter period of her life, after her health began to fail."

[&]quot;Are you not strong?"

[&]quot;Not very."

[&]quot;Then we will have tea, in order that you may get to bed in reasonable time. Your friend there talks of diet and study as the

reason of all the want of health so generated amongst young people in our day—and, possibly, she is not altogether wrong. For many part, however, I believe the late hours has a great deal to do with it." He said, ring the bell with some vehemence, who Blanche could not forbear suspecting, the wish of forestalling Mrs. Barnet's reappearance, had quite as large a share in 1 motives, as consideration for her health comfort.

The tea was served, made, and taken; a Blanche was meditating her retreat, when gurgling noise in her companion's thro caused her to look up. The next moment, leant backwards in his chair, and from ther fell, a heavy, and to all appearance, lifely mass upon the ground. She flew to his sistance; his face was purple, he was eviden in a fit. To untie his neckcloth, to raise head upon her knee, and to scream loudly assistance, was Blanche's instantaneous in

Plse. Nor were her efforts ineffectual. The second tokens of revival; but the ack had not, evidently, spent its strength.

Miss Vavasour intreated the landlady would

"Pray stand aside," she cried, as every inate of the inn crowded into the room, and
thered round the patient, screaming—talking
proposing every sort of absurdity by way of
remedy, yet giving no real assistance to the
perplexed Blanche.

"Bring cold water; throw up the window; pray, pray let the air blow over him."

"I think, ma'am, as how," said a lame old ostler, "the gentleman had better be put upon the sofa."

"Yes, yes; lift him upon the sofa-and hasten, pray let some one hasten, for medical advice."

Nobody, however, moved. It was so much more entertaining to stand there and see what was going forward. Blanche remarked this inactivity, and placing a sovereign in the ostler's hand, she entreated him to go.

"Yes, sure, Miss, I wull."

And in a very short time the already numerous group received an addition in the form of Mrs. Barnet and her cousin's husband, the chemist, apothecary, and it should be added, veterinary surgeon of the place.

Fortunately, the patient's malady demanded precisely the treatment with which Mr. Wally was most conversant. A vein was opened; after a few moments the blood came in drops—after a few more it ran with sufficient freedom; and finally, recovered consciousness proved the treatment right.

"Well, my dear Miss Vavasour," Mrs. Barnet exclaimed, when at a late hour they began
preparing for repose—" well, if we haven't
had adventures enough for one day, I'm sure
I don't know what would be. First to be
overturned—no, not exactly overturned, but to
have to get out of the chaise and wait under a

hedge; and then, this old gentleman being so civil, and the stage coachman so ungenteel; and our coming to this inn all off the London road; and our dining with him, and my going to see Susan Wally, and leaving you behind, just as if it was on purpose to save his life; poor, dear old gentleman! I declare, I never knew anything so extraordinary in all my life—did you Miss Vavasour?"

"No," replied Blanche; "but as I never left Marshampton before, I could not easily have met with adventures, travelling adventures, at least."

"No; but it's my opinion one might go to London twenty times, and back again as often, and never meet with anything like this."

"Perhaps, it's the beginning of a Romance."

"A what?"

"A Romance;" said Blanche, a little mischievously.

"No, no; I don't think that; there's no such thing as romance in real life." Mrs.

Barnet answered.—Whether with truth or not, those who know what real life is, only can determine. "But I'll tell you what is odd in all this business."

"Well, what is it, Mrs. Barnet?"

"Why that old gentleman—nobody seems to know his name, or anything about him; and yet, I doubt but he is somebody. Perhaps a French spy, or a half madman, like that Lord D., who's always going about in disguise, and frightening people out of their wits. I shouldn't wonder if this old gentleman were he; only I believe he is dead.—Well, I do wish I could find out who and what he is; 'tis so provoking not to know his name. He didn't let on who he is to you either, Miss Vavasour, did he?"

" No, indeed."

"Do you know I thought he might, for he seemed to take a mighty fancy to you."

" Perhaps he has fallen in love with me."

Mrs. Barnet mused for a few seconds, then suddenly exclaimed—

"I have it—I know all about him. Yes, yes—depend upon it that's the man."

" Who ?"

"Who?—Who? Why, a gentleman who used to live at Marshampton ever so many years ago. I wasn't settled there myself then; but I've often heard talk of him; and now I can't remember whether his name was Jones or Smith; but he used to be a great admirer of the late Mrs. Vavasour."

"Of mama's ?"

"Yes; didn't you ever hear tell of a gentleman of large fortune, who was very much in love with Miss Sophia Bransby, and wanted to marry her? But she wouldn't have him; and when she married your papa, the other gentleman was quite disconsolate, and left the place, and went out of his mind. So 'tis said, at least."

"And you think this is the same person?"

"I think 'tis very likely, very likely, indeed. And I shouldn't wonder, Miss Vavasour, if he was to die some day, and leave you a large fortune. I shouldn't be surprised at all."

"I should," said Blanche.

"More unlikely things than that have happened; and if so be it should come to pass, we mustn't quarrel with our accident to-day. And then, only think how lucky it was, that that uncivil stage coachman wouldn't take us up-although at the time it was very aggravating to see him go dashing by, and never caring any more about us than if we'd been common trampers or gypsies. But you see, good comes out of evil. If we hadn't been upset, we should have gone on in our own chaise, without wanting any other; and if the stage coachman hadn't behaved so rude, we shouldn't have made acquaintance with this nice, friendly old gentleman; and more than that, he might have been a corpse by this time. Oh, Miss Vavasour, but it's awful to consider that you have been the means of saving an old gentleman's life."

Blanche did feel the solemn circumstance in which she had been engaged; and very humble, very heartfelt was the prayer with which she acknowledged her gratitude to that Being, in whose almighty hands she had been but a feeble instrument.

Blanche lay awake the greater portion of that night. In fact, she had been too much excited to allow her spirits to calm readily. She lay awake; and amidst her musings various speculations respecting her recent acquaintance gained place. Not that Blanche fancied that the stranger had fallen in love with her, or that a splendid fortune would, on some future day, testify his gratitude and friendship. Still—it was undeniable he had seemed greatly interested for her; and when she recalled his tone of voice when alluding to her mother, she could not forbear acknowledging that Mrs. Barnet's last hypothesis might not be untrue.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Barnet on the following morning, "what we'd best do about our dinner yesterday?" "Our dinner?"

"Yes. Whether we ought to pay for it."

"Oh, no, I should think not."

"Did Mr. what's his name (how I do wish I knew exactly who he is,) did he tell you he meant to be at all the expense, Miss Yavasour?"

" No."

"Then, I declare, I think we ought, at any rate, to offer our share of the charge. I dare say it won't be much—it oughtn't, I am sure, at such a pokey place as this; though that's no rule, for very often the worst inns are the dearest."

"Supposing, 'Mr. what's his name,' should not be better this morning; do you think we could, in common humanity, leave this place?"

"Law, my dear Miss Vavasour, why you don't mean to set off nursing him—do you? I doubt whether 'twould be quite proper. I'm sure, at all events, Miss Bransby would not approve of it; you know 'twould be quite ruinous living at an inn."

"But I am to have a fortune left me."

"Oh, that's only my nonsense," rejoined Mrs. Barnet, growing very red. "We mustn't be running any wild goose chase after old gentlemen, nor young ones neither, in the hope of getting a fortune. It would not answer, I assure you. Besides, what would Mrs. Brownlow say? You know she's expecting you. Now pray don't, there's a dear! Oh, here's the chambermaid. Pray, young woman, how does the sick gentleman find himself this morning?"

And in reply to this interrogation, both Blanche and her fellow traveller heard, with some satisfaction, that the object of their solicitude had past an easy night; in fact, was so much better, that he had taken his departure half an hour before.

"Gone!" cried Mrs. Barnet. "Gone! well that's the strangest thing.—And didn't he leave any message for this young lady, or me?"

"No; he didn't leave no message what-

CHAPTER XII.

"MAMA, what do you think of Blanche Vavasour?" said Miss Brownlow, on the evening of the day following our heroine's arrival in Hill Street.

"Think of Blanche? Why, my dear Harriet, I scarcely know what to think. She is pretty, decidedly; and looks wonderfully little like a country girl;—better dressed also than I expected. In fact, her appearance altogether is rather elegant, and her figure will be good when she is a year or two older."

"Blanche strikes me as one of the most interesting girls I have seen for some time; so perfectly the lady."

"She has a good deal of the Vavasour about

her; but still, I question whether she will take
—she is almost too delicate to please the men;
wants brilliancy and size. Men never fancy
such etherial looking women," said Mrs.
Brownlow, with a little petulance.

For if Blanche were a Vavasour, Harriet was as decidedly a Brownlow; a circumstance by no means pleasing to her fashionable, ambitious mother. I say ambitious—for where is the mama who does not pant to see her daughter form a brilliant marriage?

Not that Harriet bore her little honoured father's lineaments, or that she was absolutely plain; she was, in fact, within a shade of being very pretty; but it was not patrician beauty.

The eldest of Captain Brownlow's sisters had been called a beauty—the beauty of Southend, Margate, and Boulogne—and Harriet was her very image. A figure, short, and nearly touching embonpoint; light shining hair, which although auburn finally, had, for many years, threatened to be yellow; a bright, blue, laugh-

ing eye; a very white and very red complexion; a thick nostril; a lip too large and pouting; an ill-defined chin, lost in the apple-like contour of the face. Such had been Miss Eliza Brownlow, and such was now her niece-with this difference, however, that excepting when her natural high spirits rendered her boisterous and coarse, the aunt had affected the fine lady; while Harriet, aware of her consequence as heiress to five thousand a year, and well connected on one side of the house, at all events, gave herself no airs whatever. She had much gaiety of disposition, and she allowed it entire play. She experienced no shyness, and she assumed none; on the contrary, if Harriet Brownlow did manifest a bias in favour of any peculiar shade of character, the leaning of her fancy was to be a dasher.

She was a universal favourite: for if her laugh were more frequent, or even more audible than is customary with well bred damsels, that laugh was still so true, so evidently from her very heart, and, moreover, served to display two rows of teeth of such surpassing whiteness—that no one but a cynic, or those who envy, could have found fault with it. And if her movements wanted grace, her carriage dignity, the frankness of her every look and gesture won on the heart; and in the confidence which she inspired, you could not but forget to criticise or blame.

Harriet and Blanche were very opposite.

Mrs. Brownlow saw this at a glance; for although a fond mother, Mrs. Brownlow was exempt from that blind partiality, which in some parents' estimation raises their children, especially their daughters, far above all other people's children. She was well aware of Harriet's deficiencies—those deficiencies, at least, which might possibly hinder her settlement in life.—As for her daughter's faults of heart or understanding, Mrs. Brownlow never once thought of them; while, as if to make amends for this omission, her watchfulness and

anxiety respecting Miss Brownlow's dress, appearance, manners, and accomplishments, were as wearing to herself, as they were often teasing to the object of all this very common

Mrs. Brownlow almost regretted she had solicitude. invited Blanche Vavasour to her house.

"Every one will be drawing parallels between her and Harriet, and that will render Harriet's likeness to those odious Brownlows twenty times more obvious. How very odd it is my daughter should have so much of the Brownlow look about her. And really, I must say I think it very provoking, that when one's husband is dead, and one has contrived, and not without some difficulty certainly, to sink his family, a daughter should perpetuate the resemblance; as if it were something to be proud of. Lord Warleigh admires Harriet, and with a little judicious management and time, she would no doubt become attached to him ;-bu Lord Warleigh will never marry a girl whos connexions-faugh !- I can't bear to think of hem! And if Harriet had only been like me Instead of her father's vulgar family, no one could have ever suspected the relationship .-But there she is, the very image of that Mrs. William Matthews; and as Mrs. William Matthews has contrived to worm herself into houses where I should as soon have expected to meet my milliner, as the late Miss Eliza Brownlow, it's morally impossible the mortifying fact can be any longer concealed-at least from people who are at all intimate there; and Lord Warleigh will find it out ere long, I've very little doubt. Mine was, assuredly, a most unfortunate marriage. Sophia Bransby's was bad enough, poor thing; but, at any rate, her children need not blush for their father's family; nor be ashamed of being like him or any of his connexions-in fact, the stronger the resemblance the better."

Such had been the tenour of Mrs. Brownlow's meditations during a portion of the previous night; and her apprehension of the possible consequence of Blanche's personal superiority over her daughter, had since received additional strength. Lord Warleigh called, and staid two hours. But as, while addressing Harriet, and listening to her mama, his eyes strayed constantly towards Miss Vavasour, Mrs. Brownlow regarded his long visit with none of those sentiments of proud complacency which would have swelled her bosom, had it occurred under other circumstances. Indeed, so much did she become alarmed for Harriet's future coronet, that she half resolved to send Blanche back to Marshampton, if the young Baron continued to manifest similar signs of admiration.

Harriet's commendation of her young friend's beauty was, therefore, not at all agreeable to her mama; inasmuch as it confirmed her own opinion on the momentous subject; and still less the rejoinder it pleased Miss Brownlow to make to her mother's doubt, respecting Blanche's chance of admiration.

"You don't think she will be admired, mama?"

"No, Harriet. I think at first, perhaps, she may be looked at; all new faces are. But when the novelty is passed, there will be very little said or thought about Blanche Vavasour."

" Lord Warleigh ____ "

"Harriet," interrupted Mrs. Brownlow, "I should really be extremely glad if you would restrain your gaiety a little when Lord Warleigh is present. I am convinced he dislikes a woman who talks loud, and goes off into a fit of hoarse laughter at every second word."

"Mama," said Harriet, reproachfully. "I do not often laugh—at least, not now."

"My child, I know it—I know how much this terrible confinement has depressed you; and it was, you are aware, on that account, that I invited Miss Vavasour to town."

"But what is the use of my being gay or feeling happy, if I may not give way to my cheerfulness?" "Nay, my dear Harriet, that is not my meaning—you know, it cannot be. Nothing in the whole world delights me more than to see you happy. It is only before Lord Warleigh I would have you practise a little, very little more restraint. When he is not present, laugh, and talk, and joke as much as you please; but in his society, I should really be glad if you would be a little more posée. You saw how much he looked at Blanche; and she is very quiet in her manner. Her voice, too, is never raised."

"Ah, how beautiful it is! So rich, so musical. If I had such a voice as that, I think I would almost take the trouble of modulating it."

"Your voice is as sweet, but you neglect it.

Blanche—on the contrary—'

Harriet laughed and shook her head.

"Mama, I shall never be a Blanche Vavasour; besides imitations are bad. So let me rest as nature made me;—believe me, I am past improvement."

- "In one respect, I hope you never will be like Miss Vayasour."
 - " What is that?"
 - " Her romantic turn of mind."
 - "I am not aware that Blanche is romantic."
 - "What do you make of that adventure on the road?"
 - "I think it perfectly delightful—I absolutely envy Blanche. Nothing half so piquant ever happened to me, although I have been travelling all my life."
 - "And I sincerely hope nothing so delightful ever will happen to you," retorted Mrs. Brownlow, sarcastically.
 - "Mama, you speak as if you consider Blanche to have been wrong."
 - "Not exactly wrong. There is nothing reprehensible in any part of her proceedings at that inn. And yet, if Blanche had been my daughter, I should have been better pleased had she made out her journey in a quiet unromantic manner. For there are many things,

which, although not wrong in themselves, bring with them all the consequences of evil. Speaking of the Due d'Enghien's murder, the astute Talleyrand is reported to have said—' C'est pisqu'an crime—c'est use faule'—and as in polities, so in the every day occurrences in life; a mistake is very often more to be lamented than even a wrong action."

- " In its consequences, of course, mama," said Harriet archly.
 - " Test yest of course."
- "Then, what evil consequence is likely to arise from Blanche's adventure?"
- "She has made acquaintance with a very dubious character; which, considering her position in life, is certainly to be regretted."
- "How do you know that this singular old gentleman may not turn out some great man in disguise; who having taken a fancy to Blanche, or who, out of gratitude to her for saving his life, will marry her to his heir; or if he has no heir, will leave her a hand-

some fortune, in accordance with Mrs. Barnet's prediction?"

"It is far more probable that he is not in his right mind; and if so, he may make himself extremely disagreeable; especially, as he seems to have taken a fancy to Miss Vavasour. I had a mad lover once, myself; and never shall I forget the persecution I endured. I was waylaid; go where I would, I was sure to meet him; his letters were a perfect nuisance; once he fired a pistol at me; then he challenged my brother; then insulted my poor mother. In fact, he was the pest of the whole family; and really I shall feel very little obliged to Blanche if she is the means of entailing on us a repetition of the nuisance; particularly as we have no gentleman in the house. Yes, Harriet, you may think the matter very laughable, but I assure you, we did not."

[&]quot;What became of your admirer?"

"Oh, poor man, at last he fell into the Serpentine, and got drowned; to, I must confess, our inexpressible relief."

"Did you illuminate on the occasion?" asked Harriet, twisting her eye-glass in a manner, which, had she been maid of honour, would, it is said, have given umbrage in an exalted quarter.

"Not exactly. At least I believe not; for, when it happened, I was from home, staying with poor old Mrs. Daventry, at Marshampton, where I became acquainted with your father," concluded Mrs. Brownlow, with a sigh; which was not, however, one of lamentation for her departed lord; but of regret that they had ever met.

"In one respect, mama, I must say, I think Blanche stupid enough. I mean, that she did not discover this strange old man's name. Had I been in her place, I should have made him tell it me. Either by fair

means or by foul I would have learnt every item of his history.

- Ferhaps Blanche did not wish to know."
- "COh yes, she did;—she is dying with curiosity."

CHAPTER XIII.

BLANCHE did not expire in consequence of her anxiety. About a fortnight after her arrival in Hill Street, she received the following letter—

"Dear Madam,

"The individual, who perhaps, is indebted to your presence of mind for prolonging his existence, is a person, whose proximity of relationship might possibly excuse the inquisitiveness you may have considered impertinent; and it must also plead on his behalf if the enclosed should, in your eyes, assume the same obnoxious hue.

"Yours ever,

"LIONEL VAVASOUR."

Newstoke Priors, May 19, 182-.

The enclosure was a draft on Mr. Vavasour's banker, for a hundred pounds.

Blanche coloured a little on first ascertaining the nature of the gift. She would rather have received trinkets, or any other, perhaps, as useless token of remembrance, according to the instinct of her pride, at least; and Harriet agreed with her. But common sense and Mrs. Brownlow took the opposite side. The present was a very handsome one, and ought not to be less welcome, or appear less valuable, because more likely to be useful: and the expences incident upon her position, very speedily convinced Miss Vavasour, that this reasoning was correct.

She experienced some little trouble in replying to Mr. Vavasour's laconic communication. For although women are proverbial for their facility in letter writing, at eighteen this talent is seldom much developed; and Blanche spent the whole morning, and spoilt three sheets of paper in replying to her kinsman.

mama would wish to affront, you are to take my place. Now, don't expostulate, the thing is settled."

" Will Lady Alicia expect me—or shall I be received as something contraband?"

" I wrote to Lady Alicia, mentioning exactly how the matter stood; and here is her answer-perfectly polite, you see. She does expect you; and if you are in good looks, and likely to grace her rooms, she will receive you with a most benignant smile; if not, I suppose she will take very little notice of you. But, in either case, you will spend a pleasant evening. Lady Alicia has the best people in town at her house, particularly the leading men. Now then, be off, and be sure you make a sensible selection." Blanche left the room, smiling at Harriet's last expression. What evidence of sense could the choice of a dinner-dress display? And yet there may be sense, even in trifles such as that.

On more than one account, Blanche would

gladly have declined the invitation; but a girl of eighteen is seldom her own mistress, when away from home, especially; and aware that this was not an instance in which she was at liberty to indulge her private inclinations, she repaired to Madame D's, and there chose, or rather suffered Mrs. Brownlow to select, a dinner dress. And it was judiciously chosen—of rich materials, yet as respected make and colour, simple. It was precisely the dress adapted both for the wearer and the occasion.

Harriet assured her friend, that she would certainly experience a favourable reception from Lady Alicia Raby; and Mrs. Brownlow entered Lady Alicia's drawing-room with feelings of entire composure. There could not be a question but that "the young friend," whom she had petitioned might become her daughter's representative, was perfectly eligible.

Very beautiful was Blanche Vavasour, as with rather more colour than usual, and with her

small and delicate head thrown back, for with her, timidity assumed, as it does not unfrequently, the appearance of pride, she entered that formidable room. Her reception, however, was not gracious; it was frigid in the last degree. On that day, Lady Alicia was honoured by the presence of a bride and a duchess, the wife, also, of a man closely connected and of great influence with the ministry; and Lady Alicia, who had two sons to be provided for, besides a great longing for a sinecure for Mr. Raby, was too much delighted with the distinction, too anxious to propitiate her Grace, to bestow either her thoughts or her attention on her inferior guests. After, therefore, presenting her forefinger to Mrs. Brownlow, and bowing formally to Blanche, she returned to the sofa where sat the Duchess of C---.

Mrs. Brownlow found a seat near a lady of her acquaintance; and Blanche thankfully availed herself of one vacated by Lord William Fitzherbert. A sister of the Duchess's occupied part of the sofa where Blanche had placed herself; but as no introduction had taken place, not a syllable was exchanged between them. Lady Jane Flaxton merely turned her head, and after leisurely, or it would appear critically, surveying Miss Vavasour, threw her dark eyes in the direction taken by Lord William Fitzherbert; then, as the challenge passed unheeded, she turned once more, and stared at Blanche with all the impertinent hauteur high born ladies, occasionally, think themselves entitled to assume when thrown in contact with one of the non-privileged class; and in the present instance, perhaps, further evoked by Lord William's desertion.

Blanche coloured and looked down, and wished herself, with all her heart, at home again. Her embarrassment, however, gradually wearing off, she amused herself with watching those by whom she was surrounded; and soon was her attention fixed on one group in particular. It consisted of two ladies, one a

daughter of the house, the other, from the costliness of her dress, apparently a wife, and a
rich one. These were seated on an ottoman;
while near them stood, with his back against
an elaborately wrought Buhl cabinet, what
appeared to Blanche, the very epitome of masculine conceit. She had heard of exquisites
and exclusives, of dandies and fine gentlemen;
and in her fancy she had sometimes pictured
them; but never anything to equal this. It was
not the over-fashion of his dress, but his manner, his style, and when he turned his head so
that she might discern his features, it was the
expression of his countenance, which gave rise
to this impression.

Quite evident it was that he felt himself infinitely superior to every other person present; and that he considered, that in *listening* to the fair beings who were manifestly straining every nerve to please and entertain him, he did to the full as much as could be reasonably expected from so exalted an individual—

for scarcely did even a monosyllable escape his lips.

Blanche longed to learn the name of this amazingly conceited man. In her mind she ran over the peerage in search of unmarried Marquises or Dukes; even the Royal Family, passed in quick review. But they were all too little or too much advanced in years, besides being fair and inclined to corpulency, while he was dark, and slightly made. Blanche could not, to her own satisfaction, assign either name or station to this gentleman; and while still debating between two noblemen, who at that time divided the world of fashion, she was startled by a general move; and a fresh subject of inquiry sprung up—who was to hand her to table?

For unmarried and unknown women, the five minutes subsequent to the announcement of dinner, are really absolutely awful. The dread of being *shipwrecked*, as they say in . India, when an unfortunate girl has found her-

rior apprehension, that the lady of the house will recommend her to the mercy of some man who perhaps had fixed his choice upon another fair one, render that little interval of time particularly disagreeable.

Miss Vavasour's suspense did not last long although the petty anxiety terminated in as a manner which was far from being favourable toher self-composure. She saw one or two of the matrons duly conducted towards the doorshe saw her well-bred neighbour languidly accept Lord William Fitzherbert's proffered arm = -; she observed an elderly, good-tempered looking 8 man approach; -she hoped he meant to take-e compassion on her, and the impression raised her spirits; when, suddenly, the conceited gentleman, who had so much amused and puzzlecill her, turned his head, and after a momentary glance around the apartment as if to decide his choice, stalked towards her and presented his arm.

Miss Raby looked mortified, and Blanche
was not without her share of petty vexation.
The one had been purposely slighted—the
ther chosen simply because she was the most
significant person there; and the affront to
Miss Raby became, of course, more marked.

No intercourse of words took place between Miss Vavasour and the gentleman who had Conferred on her thus unwelcome an attention. She had served his purpose, and now might safely be neglected. Nevertheless, the dinner passed pleasantly to Blanche. On her right hand sat the same good-natured looking man she had previously remarked, and she found him an agreeable companion. Many girls would have thought otherwise; for Sir John Chetwynd was one of those members of the senate with whom the House of Commons constitutes the sum total of existence. For more than thirty years he had been a member of the House, and he could think and talk of little else. Blanche listened eagerly; she had, rest in that august assembly, and a most willing auditor she proved, while the prosy Baron et talked of this debate and that speaker; which of the first was likely to be worth hearing, which would be adjourned, and which concluded; and of the latter, who were the most popular, most tedious, or most promising.

One name alone he did not mention, and Blanche began to think him sadly wanting in discrimination. It appeared so exceedingly extraordinary, that he should not even allude Mr. Vavasour. At last she ventured on inquiring—"Did he not very much admire Mr. Edward Vavasour?" In place of answering Sir John opened his grey eyes, and fasteness them on Blanche with an expression of surprise, which rather startled her; she feared she had been guilty of some solecism in good manners or maidenly reserve, and in extenuation she informed Sir John, that she and Mr. Edward Vavasour were distantly related. He

looked still more astonished, then said in a very

"Vavasour is a relation, is he? Then don't you know him?"

Blanche answered in the negative. The Baronet smiled, threw a significant glance towards her other neighbour, and muttered a few words, the sense of which appeared to be, that Edward Vavasour was by her side.

Edward Vavasour, there, beside her! Impossible! The thing was scarcely credible; Sir John must surely be mistaken. Blanche would not, could not think it possible that this fop, this coxcomb, this being of ineffable conceit was no other than the hero of her romantic, high-wrought fancies; the man, whom in her day dreams she had endowed with every grace of body and of mind. It was really quite provoking to find herself thus mistaken; and Blanche continued to refuse her faith until she saw him bow his head in answer to the appellation. There was no longer any room to doubt; and

henceforward, Sir John lost his willing auditor. She was far too much disappointed, too much vexed at this downfal of her bright imaginings, to feel any further interest either in the house or in its members.

At the usual time, the ladies left the dinner table; and at the usual time, also, Mrs. Brownlow and her charge returned home, each bitterly inveighing against Lady Alicia's party. Blanche saw nothing of her cousin after dinner. In fact, he and Sir John did not make their appearance in the drawing-room; both having betaken themselves to the house:-the one, to dose away the time and give a silent vote; the other, to deliver a speech which electrified St. Stephen's, and which, on the following day, Blanche perused with almost incredulity. It seemed scarcely possible, that such eloquence, such feeling, above all such sense could emanate from the coxcomical, affected man she had met at Lady Alicia Raby's.

[&]quot;Mama," said Harriet, archly, "I am ter-

ribly afraid I must subscribe to your opinion— Blanche will certainly prove one of those young ladies who cannot move without meeting with some singular adventure."

"What has she met with now?" asked Mrs. Brownlow, looking half alarmed.

"Why, it seems, that yesterday, she was handed to table by her cousin, Mr. Vavasour, the member for D—, sat beside him, and Yet neither of them had the slightest suspicion of the circumstance of their being related. Didn't she tell you?"

"No, indeed; Blanche said nothing about it."

"Now, isn't it droll, mama?"

"So that was Mr. Vavasour, the member for D —, was it? A very fine young man he is too. I couldn't imagine who it was. But why did not Blanche introduce him to me? She really ought."

"She was not introduced herself; only found out the relationship accidentally; and she has taken quite a dislike to him; declares he is the greatest puppy in the world; that he handed her to table only to escape another lady, who, it seems, was making very fierce love to him."

"Miss Raby, I suppose. She was very pointed in her attentions, unquestionably. But Blanche must not take such fancies into her head; nor allege motives which may be altogether false. Civility, if offered, should be received as civility, without troubling our head to discover the probable why or wherefore of its motive. And as for a girl who has seen so little of society setting herself up as judge, and calling Mr. Vavasour a puppy, the most conceited puppy in the world, I can only say, that it appears to me to indicate more presumption than is altogether becoming."

"La, mama, a girl like Blanche is just as likely to know whether a man is conceited or not, as any one else."

"I beg your pardon; a girl of Blanche's age and experience can form no just criterion of the measure of pretention enjoyed by the different individuals she may chance to meet; and remember, that conceit, like money, is comparative: what would be unpardonable affectation in one man, is perfectly allowable in another. Blanche considers Mr Vavasour a conceited puppy; I saw nothing about him that his fortune, his talents, and the high estitation in which he is held by all classes, do not fully justify."

"Mama, I think you have fallen in love with Mr. Vavasour."

"I wish Mr. Vavasour would fall in love with you," was Mrs. Brownlow's internal reply: and from this morning, Blanche Vavasour was quite as welcome in Hill street, as if she had not threatened to occasion a defection amongst Miss Brownlow's admirers.

"Marmaduke," said Harriet to a young man, who being a first cousin, entered the drawing room without the butler's intervention, "do you know Mr. Vavasour?"

- "Vavasour? What Vavasour—the merm ber for D.?"
 - "Yes. Are you acquainted?"
 - "By sight."
 - "That won't do."
 - "What do you want?"
- "Some one who understands his characte."

 Can you assist me?"
 - "I know two of his most intimate friends."
 - "What character do they give him?"
 - "What makes you so inquisitive?"
- "We have been talking of him, and we can't agree; at least, not mama and Miss Vavasour—so you must set them right. Oh, here is Blanche. Now then, is Mr. Vavasour a conceited man or not? You needn't mind saying it, if he is. Blanche won't be angry. Will you, Blanche?"



Deda

"The greatest puppy about town," replied Marmaduke, settling his shirt collar by the looling glass.

"I cannot agree with you," said Mrs. Brownlow.

"Lord Warleigh," cried the butler, throw-ing back the door.

"He knows Vavasour intimately," mur-

"We were discussing Mr. Vavasour," was Harriet's remark, after the usual civilities had passed, and Marmaduke had taken a seat by her—Lord Warleigh by her mother. "We are sitting in judgment on Mr. Vavasour."

"Criticising his speech?"

"No, not his speech, but himself. We are all most amicably employed in pulling him to pieces; and as you are a friend of his, I conclude you will be quite willing to assist."

"You must tell me first what fault you see in Vavasour," rejoined Lord Warleigh, in a hesitating tone, while his eye strayed towards Miss Vavasour.

"We have determined that he is conceited, arrogant, and every other thing which renders a man obnoxious."

"If he were, would not that fine figure of his excuse him, auprès de vous, belles dames?"

"By no means. Miss Vavasour and I belong to the sensible portion of our sex; and never allow our eyes to blind our judgment. Now, is not that a well turned phrase?"

"It sounds a little like an Irishism."
Blanche remarked.

"Not the worse for that, when wit or smartness are in question," retorted Harriet; while Mrs. Brownlow bit her under lip.

"Upon my life—" Marmaduke began.

"I know—I know;" cried Harriet, laughing;

"after such a speech as that, I, at any rate,
ought to hold my peace when Mr. Vavasour's
conceit is being canvassed. Isn't that your
meaning, Marmaduke?"

"Not very far from it."

"But mama insists upon it that he is not conceited. She affirms, that it is nothing more than the consciousness of superiority inseparable from a mind cast in so exalted a mould as his. There is another splendid burst of eloquence!"

"Worthy of Vavasour himself," Lord Warleigh answered, slightly bowing.

"Were you at the house, last night?" inquired Blanche, still in some trifling measure interested for her cousin.

"Yes; I went on purpose to hear Vavasour: wouldn't have missed him for the world."

"And do his speeches sound as well as they read?"

"Better—infinitely better—his manner is so good; just action enough."

"And his voice?"

"The finest you can imagine. But you should hear him. One of Vavasour's crack speeches would repay you the inconvenience of being locked up and half suffocated; for you are aware, that that pleasant fate awaits all

those ladies who chose to form their opinions of our senators."

"By way, perhaps, of punishment for femocuriosity, even where it might be considered excusable," said Harriet.

"Will that system ever be improved?"
asked Mrs. Brownlow.

"Never," answered Marmaduke. "All the married men in the House of Common would, naturally, set their faces against a change which would lay them more open to their ladies' lectures and surveillance."

"And all the stupid ones would second them, of course."

"And, possibly, Miss Brownlow, all the modest would follow in the same track."

" Aye, my Lord, if there be any."

"You doubt the existence of a modest



on the hustings. Was that not the case once with you?" inquired Harriet, while her mother put another question to the somewhat embarrassed peer; for it happened that he was rather a shy man.

"Is it true, Lord Warleigh, that Mr. Vavasour refused a peerage?"

"Perfectly. Ministers wanted his support on the —— question, and offered a peerage."

"And he refused the bribe? I honour him for it; so do you, Blanche, I know."

"I should have despised Mr. Vavasour, if he had acted otherwise," said Blanche, with more emphasis than usual.

Lord Warleigh looked at her in silence for a few seconds—

"You think, as did Vavasour, that the de Vavasours of Newstoke Priors would be degraded by a modern title?"

"Was that the motive of Mr. Vavasour's refusal?" inquired Blanche.

"One of his motives it was, certainly. So

that you see, his conduct was not, after all, so very magnanimous."

"And do you imagine Mr. Vavasour would have sold his consistency, had not his family pride interposed?" again asked Blanche.

"No: I believe Vavasour to be above temptation; or, at any rate, temptation of that nature."

"For my part, I'm very much inclined to question this story of the peerage."

"Are you, Marmaduke? And on what ground, may I ask?" said Mrs. Brownlow.

"Why, they say, Vavasour's a sensible man; now, will you tell me where lies the sense of doing a foolish thing?" Marmaduke rejoined. For having himself no one title to distinction, excepting his being son to my Lord Daventry, he very naturally gave his solitary claim its due consideration. And with him, to be a peer, or to belong to one, was, decidedly, the greatest advantage any one could either covet or possess.

"He did not think it foolish," replied Mrs. Brownlow.

"That makes no difference. If a peerage were offered to Mr. Vavasour, and he refused it, he acted like a fool ——"

"In your opinion."

"In every body's."

"Not in mine;" said Blanche; but Marmaduke was growing warm, and did not heed her observation.

"I would lay any wager," he continued—
"I would lay anything, that there's not a man
in London who would not agree with me in
thinking Vavasour a fool. Baronetcies are
refused constantly; no man cares for a
baronetcy in these days; at least, no man who
happens to know whether he ever had a grandfather or not; but a peerage is quite another
thing; and I maintain, that if Vavasour did
refuse a peerage, he's the greatest blockhead I've
ever met with."

No one contradicted this assertion; and the

Marmaduke Daventry, as they walked together towards St. James's Street, still inveighing against Vavasour's folly; his companional listening in silence. He had seen something in Blanche Vavasour's manner, whilst discussing this part of her cousin's conduct, which scarcely satisfied him. Why, he could not exactly answer; unless, indeed, it were a suspicion, that she, like Vavasour, set a slight value upon similar distinctions.

"Positively one might suppose," said Mrs. Brownlow, when afterwards alone with Harriet, "that you and your cousin Marmaduke were trying which of you could best succeed in rendering this house disagreeable to Lord Warleigh. Your manner towards him this morning was so objectionable, that I really should not be surprised if we were to see no more of him. As for your cousin, he put me out of all patience."

"I thought Marmaduke more amusing than usual."

"Did you? Then, perhaps, you fancy Lord Warleigh thought as much of you."

"Lord Warleigh was very much interested, and I dare say will be here again to-morrow. His visit of this morning furnished all he expected from it—an opportunity to feast his eyes on Blanche."

"Harriet, you are incorrigible. But since you mention Blanche, allow me to suggest one remark for your and Marmaduke's consideration."

"Mama, I am all attention; and I will faithfully report your observation to my cousin.

Pray let me have it."

"What I meant to suggest, Harriet, was simply this; that if Lord Warleigh, who is Mr. Edward Vavasour's most intimate friend, should chance to repeat any of the absurd strictures you and Marmaduke have been pleased to pass upon him, it might seriously injure Blanche."

"Indeed !"

"Yes, Harriet. I am sufficiently intimate with the Vavasours of Marshampton, to know that it is a material point with them to keep on good terms with the elder and more wealth branches of the family. Now, this can hard be, if Mr. Edward Vavasour hears that Blanche and her friends make him the butt of their satirical remarks. For my own part, I am so persuaded of this necessity, that should opportunity offer, I shall make a point of shewing Mr. Vavasour every possible civility."

"And I," said Harriet, gravely, "will be assober and posée as a nun, when next Lordan Warleigh calls."

CHAPTER XIV.

Two nights afterwards, Harriet committed an imprudence. She went to the Opera; went in defiance of Mrs. Brownlow, two physicians, and a sharp east wind. Lady Wryngton, a newly married lady, and one of Miss Brownlow's intimate friends, insisted on her going. All the town rung with the praises of a recent debutante, and Harriet, well muffled up, could not possibly catch cold.

Thus urged Lady Wryngton. Harriet, then, went, and came back coughing, and in ecstacies, but not about Mademoiselle D---.

"Well, Blanche," she cried, "I have seen Mr. Vavasour; and I have very nearly lost my heart to him." Blanche opened her dark blue eyes.

"Yes, my dear, it is all but gone. So agreeable, so handsome—no, not absolutely handsome—I don't think, strictly speaking, he is handsome, although his eyes are very fine indeed—but elegant, clever; in fact, every thing a young man ought to be: neither affected nor coxcomical; on the contrary, perfectly well bred."

"Harriet, you are quizzing me."

"Indeed I am not. Mr. Vavasour is, it seems, an acquaintance of Caroline Wryngton's; he spent an hour in her box; and, as I tell you, all but stole my heart."

"Then it is not the same Mr. Vavasour I met at Lady Alicia Raby's."

"It is Mr. Edward Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, and member for D— whom I met. A tall, slight, dark man, with a very intellectual brow, and the most speaking eyes I ever saw. Was not that your neighbour?"

"Yes;" replied Blanche, feeling quite

affronted. If Mr. Vavasour were indeed all that Harriet represented him, and she was a fastidious judge on such occasions, how great was the slight he had exercised towards her.

"I don't know," continued Harriet, still occupied with Mr. Vavasour's portrait, "whether I altogether like the lower part of his face. The mouth may be well enough as far as form goes; but there is an expression about the upper lip which scarcely satisfies me. should be almost afraid that he belongs to that class of men, who carry firmness to inflexibility; and from one or two remarks he made, I suspect he would be always more inclined to look on the dark side of a character than its opposite. I fear, also, that he could be vindictive; at least, I should be sorry to have him for an enemy: but this may be only my imagination. But one thing is certain, Blanche, that your cousin is one of the most entertaining, I might almost say, fascinating men I have ever met with."

"Did you say anything of me to Mr.

"No; I thought it would be better for you to make your own explanation. Was I right?"

"Perfectly."

"And, by the bye, I have another piece news for you. Guess what it is."

" How can I?"

"Something you will be delighted to hear."

"Then tell it me at once."

"No; you shall guess. In the whole work what would give you the most pleasure?"

· " Godfrey - " cried Blanche.

"Clever girl!"

"But what of him ?"

"That you will see him very soon."

"Oh, Harriet, impossible!"

"On the contrary, quite certain. The Jupi ter is coming home immediately. I don't know why, exactly; but she may be expected an day."

"Dearest Harriet, I am—you have made me happy. But where did you hear this? Are you certain the account is true?"

"Perfectly. I heard it from Lady Wryngton; she from her brother, who, like yours, is on board the Jupiter. Now go to sleep, and dream of Mr. Godfrey Vavasour."

"Harriet, you are coughing terribly."

"No, no; it is nothing. Not a word of it to mama."

Two days afterwards, a letter from her bother confirmed the welcome tidings of his approaching arrival; and from that time, Blanche lived in a state of feverish, happy expectation.

"See," said Harriet, one afternoon on returning from the daily drive, and tossing a visiting card towards our heroine, "there is something for you, Blanche."

"Mr. Edward Vavasour;" the latter cried—
"Mr. Edward Vavasour? Oh, no; that cannot be for me."

"Who besides, in this house, do you suppose he would call upon?"

But Blanche made no answer. A young man had rushed down stairs—she looked at him, and after a cry of joyful recognition, she flung her arms around her brother's neck.

"Godfrey—dear Godfrey—when did you come, and from whence?" she asked, while together they ascended the staircase.

"I arrived half an hour ago, and I came from Marshampton."

"From Marshampton?"

"Yes. I had no idea of your being here, and went there straight; stayed just twelve hours, and then followed you to town, where I shall remain as long as you do."

"Dearest, dearest Godfrey."

"Mr. Godfrey Vavasour?" said Mrs. Brownlow, in a tone of half inquiry; while Harriet frankly offered him her hand, and bade him welcome to Old England with a degree of warmth, which a year before, would have greatly vexed her mother. But just now, she was rather pleased than otherwise, by Godfrey Vavasour's arrival, and the prospect of his being constantly in Hill Street. For in her eyes, he was no longer the good looking, pennyless young man, who might ensnare her daughter's heart, and become possessor of her fortune; but he was cousin to Edward Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, and of course, a very likely and desirable medium of cultivating an intimacy with that distinguished individual.

Mrs. Brownlow's manner, as a natural consequence of these considerations, grew, by degrees, both warm and pleasing. She gave Godfrey carte blanche for breakfast and dinner; in short, desired him to make her house his home; and even hinted that any friend of his would be always welcome there. She listened with complacency to the plans she heard projected by the young people; the delightful walks and drives they could now indulge in. With a brother at command they

could do any thing; go any where they pleased. Harriet no longer murmured at the physicians' prescription of "open air." It would be altogether different to spend a couple of hours daily in Kensington Gardens, or near the Serpentine, instead of that horrid dismal Berkeley Square. Then they might make water parties, and go to Richmond and Twickenham.

All this Mrs. Brownlow heard with the greatest calmness; she offered neither comment, opposition, nor suggestion; until Mr. Vavasour's visit having been mentioned, the propriety of Godfrey's returning the civility was mooted. The question was very nearly lost. Godfrey felt no inclination to court the acquaintance of his wealthy relative, nor Blanche to cultivate an intimacy with a man, who had so deeply wounded her self-love. Harriet preserved a strict neutrality.

Not so, however, Mrs. Brownlow. On his sister's behalf, Godfrey was, in her opinion, bound to acknowledge the civility; and she strenuously recommended an early visit.

Godfrey acquiesced; called two days afterwards at Edward Vavasour's chambers in the Albany, found him from home, and considered himself fortunate. Far more so than did Blanche, on receiving the following letter from her aunt Letitia—

"My dear Blanche,

"I suppose you have seen Godfrey before this. His running off from Marshampton in the way he did, I must confess, surprised me a good deal; he might as well have given us a few days longer of his company, I think; especially, as neither Arthur nor your father have been well these last few days—the east wind I fancy. However, I suppose, like other young people, Godfrey thinks of nothing but himself. Your father has had the rheumatism in his knee, which he caught out fishing; Arthur, a bad inflammatory cold; but with

good nursing, both are getting over their complaints. And now for the principal reason for my writing to you. Your father has had a letter from that strange old man, Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, inviting him to go and see him; you and Godfrey are included in the invitation; and you ought, on every account, to go. I dare say it will not be so pleasant as dashing about in town; but when we consider how much Mr. Vavasour may advance the interests of the whole family (not even forgetting Arthur, who is quite equal to holding a sinecure) there cannot be a doubt upon the subject. Your father cannot go by reason of his rheumatism; but you and Godfrey must-and I enclose a bill on Coutts's house, for money to pay your travelling expenses. As we do not know how long Mr. Vavasour may wish you to stay at Newstoke Priors, you had better set off as soon as possible. To say the truth, I believe your father has written to say that you will be with him You had better write yourself. Let me hear from you soon. Kind regards to Mrs. Brownlow, and love to yourself and Godfrey from

"Your affectionate aunt,

"LETITIA BRANSBY."

"Marshampton, Tuesday."

"I forgot to say that when your visit at Newstoke Priors is over, you are to come straight home. Mrs. Stoyning has a little boy; and Mary Anne Sawyer is going to be married to a nephew of Mr. Carters, your poor mother's old admirer."

"What a bore!" cried Godfrey, on hearing the pleasant excursion which awaited them.

"It is not very promising," responded Blanche; "but I suppose we must make the best of it. I dare say Mr. Vavasour won't expect us to stay there long."

"What makes him ask us at all?"

"I'm sure I can't say; and I wish most

heartily he had kept his invitation to himself."

"By Jove, so do I."

"It appears hardly reasonable," Harriet remarked, "to expect you to leave London just at present. But perhaps, Blanche," she added archly, "Mr. Vavasour wants you to become acquainted with Newstoke Priors when it is in the greatest beauty."

"Why, Harriet?"

"Nay, is not the eloquence of woods and streams proverbial? Who can say how much effect a soft, sweet tale of love, breathed in the shade of Newstoke bowers might produce?"

Blanche laughed. "I wish you could se this poor old man, Harriet."

"I have seen older married to young girls. __ =."

"Blanche, do you wish to accept this of ald fellow's invitation?" inquired Godfrey.

"To be sure not."

"Then I shall cut the matter short, by telling him at once that we decline it." Do," cried Harriet; who being herself eminently endued with the spirit of opposition, admired it exceedingly in others. "Write and decline it, by all means."

"Too late," said Blanche; "my father has,

"Never mind that; you, Mr. Vavasour, at my rate, are your own master."

"Blanche, what shall we do?"

Blanche looked wistfully towards aunt Letty's most unwelcome letter; for she was well aware, that if the engagement were broken, there would be no end to that lady's lectures and reproaches.

"My aunt," she said, "has evidently set her heart upon our going to Newstoke Priors. She fancies all manner of good fortune is to spring from this visit; now, if we disappoint her, and refuse to go, all the evil we may hereafter meet with, every misfortune which may befall any one of us, she will most assuredly attribute to our disobedience. Godfrey, you know this will be the case."

"That aunt Letitia seems to me a most un pleasant individual," observed Harriet.

"The greatest nuisance in the world. I wish with all my soul—but no, I must not say that—I believe she means well."

"Oh yes, indeed, Godfrey; I really do believe that my aunt Letitia has our interests entirely at heart, in proposing this journey; and though I wish as fervently as you can do, that she had not decided on our going, yet as she has, dear Godfrey, I think we ought not to disappoint her."

"Ah, well, I believe you are right; but I do wish the old man had kept the invitation to himself."

"But as he has not,"

"We must accept it."

It is a fact more certain than encouraging, to well intentioned purposes, that when we contemplate bestowing kindness or procuring pleasure, we not unfrequently produce a consequence totally at variance with our wishes. Letters are despatched, visits paid, parties given, hospitality dispensed, under the notion of gratifying acquaintances and friends; and in tead of any such result, how often does it happen that we greatly weary and annoy them by the means we have adopted to procure their entertainment.

Seldom, however, has intention of this description failed so signally as did Mr. Vavasour's invitation. The annoyance felt by Blanche and Godfrey on this occasion, has already spoken for itself. And Harriet's chagrin was scarcely inferior to that of her young friend, while Mrs. Brownlow viewed her guests' proximate departure with almost equal dissatisfaction. With Blanche, the prospect of forming Edward Vavasour's intimate acquaintance must inevitably vanish; and vexed by the disappointment of the promising scheme she had entertained; forgetting, moreover, her individual motive in inviting Blanche to the metropolis, Mrs. Brownlow passed some very

caustic strictures on the selfishness so all-prevailing in the present day; especially amongstthe young.

"People were ever ready enough to make a convenience of their friends, or their friends" houses. It was the bias of human nature to be selfish; and selfishness had, therefore, always flourished in the world. But not to the same extent as now. She could perfectly remember the time, when a young girl of Blanche Vavasour's age would not even have dreamt of conducting herself in the cool, free and easy manner, which it appeared Miss Vavasour intended doing. Really, this readiness to leave a house where such kindness and attention had been shewn her, the moment she received an invitation which she fancied promised more amusement, spoke quite as badly for Miss Vavasour's heart, as for her good breeding."

Thus Mrs. Brownlow argued, while Harriet, partly from her natural love of disputation, partly from her sense of justice and regard for truth, failed not to contradict her mother, and defend her friend; conduct which,
whether praiseworthy or not, was scarcely
likely to conciliate. But, however unpalateable Harriet's interference, Mrs. Brownlow
could not silence it. Neither could she prevent
the increased friendliness of manner which
Harriet, anxious to make amends for her
mother's coldness, instantly assumed.

Mrs. Brownlow could neither silence Harriet, nor check her warm-hearted request, that Blanche would promise to return to Hill Street the ensuing spring. Unable to prevent this invitation being given by one young lady, and accepted by the other, Mrs. Brownlow was obliged to solace herself with resolving, that whether accepted or not, the engagement should never be fulfilled. Blanche should not repeat her visit to Hill Street. She had done nothing but mischief since she had been there; therefore, most assuredly, if Mrs. Brownlow could prevent it, Miss Vavasour should never set her foot within those doors again.

CHAPTER XV.

It was on a bright summer afternoon, that Blanche caught the first glance of Newstoke Priors. But the aspect of a spot whose image, and whose former inmates had often peopled her wild fancy with romantic dreams, at the present moment called forth no enthusiastic feeling. Blanche could think of nothing but the singular old gentleman, whose guests she and her brother were about to be: and, in place of dwelling on the past with fond remembrance, she was occupied with calculating how long their visit must endure—whether for a week, a fortnight, or a month—and how she should discover the proper period of its conclusion; for as the wording of the invitation had

been vague in the last degree, it appeared as if everything were left to her discretion.

As the termination of the journey approached, Blanche almost worked herself into a nervous head-ache. She could discern but one subject of rejoicing in the unpleasant prospect lying before her; and that—the absence of the heir.

"I am glad he is away, at any rate," she said to Godfrey. "I dare say old Mr. Vavasour will soon get tired of us, and leave us to amuse ourselves."

Godfrey replied, by wishing he had brought his fowling piece.

"Your gun, Godfrey? What use would that be of, at this time of the year?"

"True;" replied the other, laughing. "I forgot we are only in June. But, Blanche, there must be glorious shooting over there. I wonder the old fellow didn't ask us in the autumn, instead of bringing us down here at this outlandish season. However, we won't

stay long; two or three days at the ver-

Godfrey had already expressed this determination very often; and Blanche as often eradeavoured to convince him, that having made the sacrifice, it would be only wise to render it complete, by studying their relation's wishes on this point. But now she had become so nervously timid, that she entirely agreed in thinking two or three days at Newstoke Priors, the very utmost human fortitude could undergo, or even self-denying woman's patience bear.

"Fine old place," said Godfrey; "rather too grim looking though to please me; and if it were mine, I should drain that lake, cut down all those evergreens, and make an American garden there. Perhaps, however, it looks better as it is, and more like —. Oh, there is the old man, I suppose. See, Blanche, there—on the steps waiting to hand you out. Don't forget to introduce me."

Mr. Vavasour assisted Blanche to alight

with much the same air of formal gallantry, as that he had worn on the occasion of their former meeting; and although he extended his hand to Godfrey, his demeanour was reserved and chilling. But on reaching the drawingroom, whither he had conducted Miss Vavasour, he fastened his keen eyes upon her; and either touched by her visible timidity, or that his spirit yearned towards his young and beautiful relative, his manner underwent a sudden transformation; and, after a brief struggle between formality and feeling, he drew her gently to him; and Blanche's spirits rose. She felt that the bosom to which she was thus welcomed, bore in its recess a warm heart full of kind interest for her.

"I'm but an old fashioned man, Blanche;" said Mr. Vavasour; "and mine's an old fashioned house; and all our ways are old fashioned. But still, I hope you'll be happy here. I've desired Mrs. Vyse, my house-keeper, to obey your orders, as if you were her

mistress; and I'm sure she'll do all she can tem please you, and render you comfortable. Your must make yourself at home, and if there" anything amiss, you must give your own directions. Do what you like, amuse yourselves in the best way you can; and never think of me. I'm sorry Edward's not at home to receive you; and to say the truth, I'm afraid we mustn't expect him-not yet, at least. But I dare say you and your brother will manage pretty well together, for a few days. There's a good deal to be seen in this part of the country, and we have some pleasant neighbours; so, at any rate, I'm told, for I know nothing of them. Never go out-don't like society-I'm too old for it, in a general way. But," he added with a gay smile, and a half bow, " now that I have so fair an excuse for growing young again, there's no saying what I may not do."

"Nothing—you must do nothing on our account," interrupted Blanche. "Indeed you must not—we neither of us care for gaiety; and shall be perfectly well amused wandering in those magnificent woods."

As Blanche spoke, she turned towards the window which opened on a terrace. Mr. Vavasour offered his arm, and in a few moments they were inhaling the fresh summer breeze, and gazing on a landscape to which, water and wood, and hill, and vale, and shade, and brightness, lent all their rich and beautiful variety. Blanche fancied she might be happy—very happy—at dreaded Newstoke.

She thought that pleasant thought again, when from the windows of her sleeping room she once more suffered her eye to wander over the fair scene which lay stretched on every side, and which a glorious summer moon had dressed in softer loveliness. But little did she sleep that night; for her imagination strayed back to the past; and all the glowing fantasies with which her former day dreams teemed, came flocking on her mind, and effectually banished slumber from her couch.

There was another waking eve at Newstoken Prints. Mr. Vavasour did not even attempana to sieep for some hours. A prey to restant lessness and moody thoughts, at one time-e he paced his chamber with quick, unequal footsteps: at another, he would pause before a picture which hung there. Then turn away with almost loathing on his countenance; for memory was busily at work-long bygone year came rushing back; and the departed, and at times forgotten, lived once again in his imagination. He thought of a letter he had hastily perused, although the hand which had indited it, e'en at that moment, lay in the icy grasp of death-and he remembered an unrighteous pledge which he had given; and which, for honour's sake, he must adhere to.

Blanche was up betimes and on the terrace breathing the morning air, and watching the gauzy mist, that wreathed itself into a thousand graceful forms, and then dissolving into gentle moisture, or becoming those light feathery clouds which in our climate usually chequer the blue value of heaven, left all the air heavy with dewy fragrance, and all the earth bright with the dew drops' splendour.

She was joined by Mr. Vavasour. Himself an early riser, and pleased according to the wont of early risers to find another of a kindred taste, he accosted Blanche affectionately. She replied with the frank cordiality of her age; while the conviction that she was gaining ground with her eccentric, but evidently kindhearted kinsman, gave a fresh impetus to her already high-toned spirits.

Their conversation, was not however either long or animated. After pointing her attention to some spots of beauty and interest which he wished that she and Godfrey should visit in their walks and rides, he relapsed into a silence of some duration; and which, had he been a younger man, must have proved exceedingly embarrassing to his companion; even as it was, she experienced some awkwardness; for perhaps

unconsciously, he fixed his eyes upon her animonally withdrew them to ask with the abruptness frequently apparent in his manner, whether are she had seen Edward when in London?

- " Mr. Vavasour, your son?"
- " Yes, Edward Vavasour. Did you become acquainted with him?"
- " Scarcely. Mr. Vavasour called in Hill Street, where I was staying."
- " I know. I sent him your address, and desired him to call. Were you at home?"
- "We were not," said Blanche, in an absent tone. Edward Vavasour's visit was now fully accounted for; but she could not understand, why his father had been anxious to promote their acquaintance. The simple circumstance of her having been of service to the old gentleman, when at Cross Ferry, scarcely claimed further acknowledgment than had been given; at least, not in Blanche's estimation. At length, having, during her stay in Hill Street, heard a great deal of fortune-hunting and marriage-

man cuvring, Blanche's active imagination transformed the elderly gentleman beside her into a mercenary match maker anxious to bring about an union between his heir and the wealthy Harriet Brownlow. And Blanche, who, in common with girls of eighteen, especially such luckless ones as chance to be portionless, held speculations of this nature in the most sovereign contempt, suddenly lost a considerable portion of the kindly sentiments which she had begun to entertain on Mr. Vavasour's behalf.

But this fall in the barometer could not prevent her spending a day of great enjoyment. Immediately on the removal of the breakfast equipage, the owner of the house retired, telling his young relations that they must find their own amusements. There were horses in the stable, books in the library, pictures in the gallery and state rooms, a boat upon the lake, and an endless variety of walks and drives in the park and plantations. All

were at their disposal; and he trusted these with such auxiliaries, they would contrive said their hours with pleasant occupation.

In Blanche's case, the hope was fully verified; she was entirely contented. In trutter rarely, if ever, had she been happier in the whole course of her, certainly not very extended life. Godfrey was less satisfied; he was glad to be with Blanche, but he would rather have been with Harriet; and the total repose prevailing at Newstoke Priors, the still life which pervaded everything and everybody around, appeared to him monotonous and wearisome.

"I can't bear this much longer, Blanche;" he said, on the third morning after their arrival: "I'm nearly bored to death already; and if this visit is to last many days longer, I warn you, that when you do depart, you'll have to go alone."

"How, dear Godfrey? You surely don't mean to set off without me?"

No, Blanche. But you'll be obliged to set off without me, inasmuch as I shall be no longer Godfrey Vavasour, second lieutenant of his majesty's ship, Jupiter, but a lead statue of the aforesaid most promising young officer. I protest, I feel myself half turned to lead already; and a few days more will do the thing completely. Do contrive to get the old fellow to give us our dismissal."

"We have only been here two days," replied Blanche, hesitatingly.

"And quite long enough-and too long too."

"Mr. Vavasour is so very anxious to make us happy; his taking all that trouble to get a piano for me proves how much he wishes our enjoyment."

Godfrey put up his lip, and Blanche saw it would be perfectly impossible to detain him much longer at Newstoke Priors. After all, she could not blame him. The life they were leading was not likely to prove agreeable to a young and ardent disposition, such as Godfrey's.

- "See, here comes the old fellow. Now and say something that will break the ice;

 You can't. Well, if you won't, I must."
- "Take care you don't offend him, Go
- "Don't be afraid; I'll not affront him rather than that, I would tell a white lie two. If nothing else would do, give aurate Letty the mumps, or my father an attack of pleurisy."

Mr. Vavasour entered, looking quite vivascious. He held an open letter in his hand.

"From Edward Vavasour," he said, addressing Blanche. "He writes word the Parliament will be adjourned almost immediately; and as nothing of any consequence will be brought forward during the remaind ser of the session, he will be able to get away at once; so that we may expect him this evening, or, at the latest, to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER XVI.

From this time, Blanche became quite as anxious to abridge her stay at Newstoke as her brother had been; whilst he, as if possessed of the spirit of contradiction, henceforth appeared perfectly willing to remain ten days, perhaps a fortnight longer. It was not self-interest that worked this metamorphosis; no mercenary wish to conciliate his influential relative swayed Godfrey. Sailors are seldom selfish, or calculating; nor was Godfrey. But he saw that on Edward's part an effort had been made, and he felt some return was incumbent both from himself and Blanche. To leave Newstoke Priors immediately on Vavasour's arrival, would be alike ill-bred and unfeeling; and so

he said to Blanche, and she could not dem it.

Edward Vavasour did not arrive that ever ing, and Blanche rejoiced in the delay. To next morning she spent almost entirely alors Godfrey was fishing; his sister, believing this to be her last day of free enjoyment and unrestraint, that henceforth she should never enter the library, the picture gallery, or even the garden, without hazarding an encounter with her supercilious cousin, resolved to make the most of the reprieve; and after dreaming away an hour or two surrounded by the portraits of those ancestors of whom she was so proud, she passed into the former, where were some very ancient manuscripts, to her, objects of great interest from the associations they recalled; but, judging from the careless manner in which they were preserved, little valued by their actual owner.

The library was a long, low room, panelled with oak elaborately wrought, and nearly black with age. The ceiling, of the same material, was divided into compartments, also delicately carved; and over the chimney, were specimens of Grinling Gibbon's wonder-workin schisel. Along the centre of the chamber, ran a narrow oak table, bearing, amongst Other writing implements, a silver inkstand, whose size and weight betokened high anti-Quity. In each corner of the apartment stood tall, grim-looking cabinets. Massive ebony bookshelves, laden with dusky tomes, recalled a generation which had passed away. Except the cawing of the rooks, no sound disturbed the silence of that spot; and the light was mellowed, for it came through windows of stained glass. All was silent; all was, perhaps, melancholy; but all was in good keeping.

> Blanche, desirous of making some extracts from one of the manuscripts above alluded to, was seated in an embrasure of a window; and if the gorgeous colours that surrounded

there was yet something in the peculiar styland nature of her beauty—the chaste forehead the delicately pencilled brow, the nose just aquiline, the long blue eye, with its dark fringeresting on the soft cheek — which harmonised admirably with the place. No poetic fancy—no tasteful eye would have wished her otherwise surrounded. It was a picture of rare choice and beauty in an entirely appropriate frame.

Suddenly her occupation was suspended, and her pen fell from between her fingers. The door of the room had opened, and Edward Vavasour appeared. He was speaking over his shoulder to Godfrey, who had lingered in the hall, and did not observe Miss Vavasour until she had risen from her seat, and he had half crossed the room; and the surprise which his countenance expressed when he did recognise her, the start, the suppressed exclumation, with the attempt at self-recover

Presented so ridiculous an aspect, that Blanche very nearly laughed.

Ward, drawing a few steps nearer, and looking as if he thought he ought to shake hands with his relation, but did not quite know how.

"Aye, Blanche, my sister; you're not acquainted, I believe; at least, have never been regularly introduced. Blanche, Mr. Edward Vavasour. Mr. Edward Vavasour, Miss Vavasour," said Godfrey, glancing wickedly at Blanche.

And then there came a very awkward pause, broken by our heroine (for women usually recover their self-possession more easily than men), with an allusion to his unexpected arrival; which enabled them to talk of roads, and dust, and weather, and post-horses, and the Houses of Parliament, and the probable speedy termination of the present London season.

"What were you about, Blanche, with all

those old parchments?" inquired God ey.
"Making compilations? I hope you're root
going to be fool enough to turn author."

"No, indeed, Godfrey: I have just sense enough to save me from such a step; although, I must confess, my employment was one in which it is said authors sometimes indulge, and to no trifling extent—pirating."

"Are you partial to these things?" asked Edward, taking up a roll of manuscripts.

"Oh, yes; she is absolutely mad about them," Godfrey exclaimed, without giving his sister time to answer.

"If such, indeed, be your taste," Edward Vavasour replied, while a flash of pleasure lighted his eye, "you will not easily tire of Newstoke Priors. To those who take an interest in antiquity, or rather its remains, we possess a treasure-house." Then, crossing the room, Mr. Vavasour unlocked a cabinet; and soon was the table in front of Blauche covered with richly ornamented missals; parch-

ments nearly black with age, illegible from time; and curious documents of every sort, size, and description.

Blanche was better pleased than Godfrey; who, after glancing carelessly over some of the most conspicuous, whistled a pointer dog which had taken a fancy to him, and left the room.

I will not say that, of the two remaining occupants of the library, either was quite at ease, or very deeply interested in the manuscripts. But Blanche felt that Mr. Vavasour was anxious to amuse her, and she endeavoured to appear amused at any rate; and if her cousin's attention sometimes strayed, and his eye was not always fastened on the parchment, perhaps it was, that he was marvelling in his mind where he had previously met his companion.

They were joined by the elder Mr. Vavasour. Blanche coloured as the old man approached; on what account, she would have found some

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Entry in expansion, but whether reasons and able te nuc, she mi experience a degree o signess, and gistly profited by the interrup tion to break up her titte-à-tête with Edwar-She chi in however, with one very happay conviction on her mind; namely, that E-dward Vavasour meant to enact the well-mannered host, not the impertinent puppy; that, in his own house, he would be as agreeable, and gentiemanlike, and entertaining, as elsewhere the reverse: and though here was nothing to flatter her self-love, in truth, a great deal of an opposite character, it was still pleasant to know, that while at Newstoke Priors, he would treat her with consideration and respect.

"Mr. Vavasour," said Blanche, that evening while they stood together, watching a splendid sunset, which, however, to say the truth, scarcely rivetted his attention; " shall I solve that enigma for you?"

" What enigma?"

- "The enigma, or, perhaps, I should say, Question, which just now so much perplexed
 - "Can you then read my thoughts?"
 - "Yes; you were asking them where you met Blanche Vavasour before. Is it not so?" Edward looked conscious. "And I will resolve the difficulty. It was at a dinner-party, given by a certain Lady Alicia Raby. You looked about for the most insignificant person in the room, that you might hand her to the dinnertable, and selected me."
 - "Nay, nay," cried Edward, colouring, "not as the most insignificant."
 - "You are bound, in common politeness, to deny the charge; and unless I choose to be vindictive and malicious, I suppose I am equally bound to believe you—although appearances tell terribly against you."
 - "It certainly did not occur to me, that that—I was in the presence of her to whom my father owes his life," Edward answered, and

with so much feeling in his time, that Blanc-

From that moment, she began to think meaning favourably of Edward Vavasour. It was need, she saw, good breeding, but filial piety which induced his altered manner towards her. And his affection for his father appeared more striking from the circumstance, that although he might be proud of his son's talents, and fond of his conversation, Mr. Vavasour was evidently very far from being an indulgent parent. It was touching, also, from Edward's superiority in all respects.

"It was very stupid in me," said Edward, addressing Blanche on the following morning, that when we met at Lady Alicia Raby's, I did not suspect your Vavasour extraction; for you have all the features of our race; whilst I, inherit none."

"Do you consider me like your father?"

No, not like my father;" Edward answered,
looking amused. "I do not think you like my

those Vavasours who flourished in the olden time; and whose features have been handed down to us on canvass. Come with me to the Picture gallery, and I will shew you yours."

They went together and Blanche, who had been interested even by the housekeeper's prolix explanation—who had spent many happy, lonely hours in that gallery, transported in imagination to the past, almost conversing with the dead—now with unmixed delight retrod that fairy ground, under the guidance of a companion, completely master of his subject, and nearly as enthusiastic as herself, in all that concerned the antiquity of her family; or, indeed, that related to the romance of bygone days.

"I love the days of chivalry," he said; "how different, how superior were they to the present time. Then, men were men. And women—oh what a contrast, what a proud contrast between the lofty spirited damsel, who

she would accord it; and the you interested girl of modern fashiona to leap into the arms of any who can provide her with a suita ment.

Edward spoke with animatic remembered Lady Alicia's dinner possibly he did as much; for his assumed the same contemptuous gon that occasion. She, however considered the expression objection quite natural: arose from feeling entirely comprehend. Under simulations, she might herself have acted just as he had done.

"You, Mr. Vavasour," she said, mentary silence, "pre-pot

"Then, rely upon it, they are people who have neither name nor lineage to be proud of. We have both. The Vavasours, you are aware, followed William of Normandy to England."

"All families who can boast of anything like a Frenchified extraction say the same," observed Godfrey, who had sauntered after his sister to the picture gallery.

"Yes," answered Blanche, "and the rest of the world remark, that as the conqueror was so very numerously attended, it is not marvellous he was a conqueror."

"Aye, but we did come over with him," said Edward, with good humoured pertinacity. "And, moreover, our progenitor, Sir Raoul de Vavasour, received as his portion of the spoil, those very lands which have been transmitted hitherto in an unbroken male descent."

"Edward, is it true, that you refused a perage some months back?" asked Godfrey.

[&]quot;Who said I did?"

VOL. I.

- Lord Warleigh, I believe. Wasn't it Lord Warleigh, Blanche?"
- "Yes," Blanche answered, and she coloured slightly, as the conversation in which this information had been given, came back to her recollection.
- "Were you well acquainted with Lord Warleigh!" inquired Edward, looking earnestly at Blanche.
- "When in London, I saw him frequently; he is intimate with the family with whom I was staying, and often called."
 - " Mrs. Brownlow?"
 - "Exactly."
- "And during Warleigh's frequent visits, perhaps you sometimes honoured me, by making me the subject of your conversation."
- "Once, I believe, we did: the morning after Lady Alicia Raby's dinner party." Blanche answered rather mischievously.
- "And shewed very little mercy, I dare say."

Another mischievous glance was Blanche's answer.

"But did you really refuse that peerage?" again asked Godfrey.

"If I had declined it, would you blame me?" said Edward, addressing Blanche.

"No; I don't think I should."

"Then, I will acknowledge that I did refuse to sink the name of Vavasour beneath the paltry honour of a modern title. All our house, however, do not hold our opinions on this subject."

There was a slight emphasis on the last our, which Blanche detected, and felt pleased with.

"I'm not sure that I do, for one," said Godfrey.

"It was to my father I alluded," Edward answered.

"And he disapproved your refusal—is that possible?" inquired Blanche.

"You are surprised, and so was I. Never-

occasion.

"You talk," said Godfrey name under a modern title, revive the Barony of Vavasa an old Baron de Vavasour, su

"There were several; but ticular line. Bertrand de Va the first Baron, and created, the year 1148, belonged to very distant branch of the farevived his title, therefore, app shining in borrowed plumage added, with a good humoured much too proud a man for that

CHAPTER XVII.

" DEAR Mrs. Turner,

"Before leaving London, I promised I would write to you when we had been here a few days; and I now joyfully fulfil my engagement. I know you will be glad to hear that our visit to Newstoke Priors is very far from proving the disagreeable affair, both Godfrey and I apprehended; on the contrary, we have spent ten very pleasant days in ——shire; and although my brother was a little restive at first, he is now perfectly contented to remain as long as Mr. Vavasour seems anxious to detain us. Nothing can exceed his kindness. Dear old man, he appears to have but one wish; that I should be happy, and feel myself entirely at

home; and for his son, were I one of the ladies of the olden time, and he a preux chevalier, he could not shew more gallantry, or more device.

Of course, he and Godfrey are the best friends possible.

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"I was quite mistaken in the opinion formed of Edward Vavasour, and intend never again to pass an hasty judgment. He is not ot in the least conceited-proud he may bewhat Vavasour is not? But he is too sensible Ile to be a fop; of too superior a stamp to be a coxcomb. Perhaps, dear Mrs. Turner, you will remind me that the words fop and coxcomb are synonymous. To me, they convey as a different impression-describe two sorts of vanity, neither of which I can detect in Mr ... Vavasour. And now that I have made you acquainted with the inmates of Newstoke Priors 8, you will like to hear some description of the place itself. The mansion is old, very old-foas the name imports, it was originally a convent suppressed at the reformation, and grante d

by Henry the Eighth to one of his especial favourites-and, under some circumstances, I can imagine this an extremely gloomy abode. In the winter, and without agreeable companions, I should scarcely fancy being here. But as I have seen Newstoke Priors, I should pronounce it a most interesting and beautiful spot. The park, or, as I say it should be called, the pleasance, extends nearly six miles. The trees are of immense antiquity; and I could never weary of the view from the window of my sleeping-room. There are beautiful drives and rides; but perhaps the most interesting spot, is the ruin of the original dwelling of the Vavasour family; next to that a church, called 'the two sisters,' in consequence of the melancholy catastrophe which led to its foundation. The situation is truly picturesque. We are, you know, but a few miles from the ocean, and on the very brink of the cliff, stands this old building, dilapidated, and so much encroached on by the water, that it has long been considered unsafe, and consequently forsaken

total by press and singregation. But the wait and not us as yet entire. The monument remain: iter sime, mere ere, even nov accept lanners waving. The stained glass similiss, ibingh briken in many places, still decis the mouldering pavement with their gorgeous ordinas: and although the try has crept نائس here and there between the massive fragments of grey stone, its dark leaves rather appear 30 some intended ornament, than the evidence of decay. Altogether, I can scarcely fancy any TI TI spot more solemn than this old church, with the waves rustling around, and even beneath its base; for the building is in many places undermined. But it still appears uninjured; it looks as if it might endure a century; and yet a _ == a few months, or days, or even hours, might _3 see the noble edifice a heap of mutilated ruins.

"The history of its foundation is as follows: In the year 13—, a vessel was wrecked off this coast. Two ladies of noble birth had been among her passengers—one was drowned—

the other saved, I know not how. From motives of gratitude and affection, the survivor built this church, and largely endowed the neighbouring priory, in order that masses for the repose of her relation's soul might be performed. It is said, that the spires of the building are so constructed, as to form a landmark to vessels sailing near those rocks which proved fatal in the instance I have mentioned. If so, your common sense and kind heart will and greater cause for regret in the destruction of the church, than the loss of a merely pictwesque object. I can scarcely tell you, dear Mrs. Turner, how powerfully this venerable building affected my feelings. I forgot entirely the present—the past filled all my mind. It was not a deserted ruin fast passing into decay which I beheld; but a stately sanctuary, consecrated to that faith whose offices appeal so strongly to the imagination. I seemed to hear the organ's peal, the solemn chant; to see the gorgeously attired priests, the richly decorated altar, the white robed choristers, and to inha the spicy incense.—But you are laughing at my folly, my romance, as Godfrey does most unmercifully. Mr. Vavasour, too, seems hal inclined to frown, when I occasionally suffer my enthusiasm to break forth. Not so his son. He does not, certainly, expatiate as I am wont to do; for, you know, men always endeavour rather to conceal their feelings than exhibit them. But silent though he be, there is something in Edward Vavasour's manner and the expression of his eye, which plainly tells me, that in his inmost mind, he is quite te as enthusiastic and romantic as I am-I should have written that last word foolish-but I cannot associate the idea of folly with Edward Vavasour.

"But I must bring this long, long letter to an end. Farewell.

"Yours affectionately,

"BLANCHE VAVASOUR____"

Newstoke Priors, Wednesday. "Miss Vavasour, you want a frank," said Edward, entering the room, followed by Godfrey. "Shall I fold your letter as well as direct it?"

"Thank you, I believe I can manage to fold it," replied Blanche, doubling the paper in a harried manner; for it suddenly occurred to her, that Edward might see how very frequently his name appeared in that long letter.

"Blanche," cried Godfrey, "what a figure you're making of that letter. Do give it me—
I never saw a woman in my life who could fold a letter decently."

"Womens' fingers are not so strong as ours," said Edward, quietly, while writing the superscription.

"And we want patience. As my aunt used to try and impress upon my mind when I was a naughty, impatient little girl; nothing is well done that is not done with patience," Blanche added. "Yes, that's enough—Mrs. Turner, Marshampton, ——shire."

"Patience is certainly sometimes the foundation stone of excellence. But, is your's really an impatient character?" asked Edward.

"Indeed, I fear it is."

"And so is mine," said Godfrey; "and, therefore, I beg, Blanche, that you will observe that it is half-past twelve o'clock; the horses have been waiting this quarter of an hour, and you have not got your habit on. Edward, you must come into —shire and make acquaint-ance with that aunt of ours; she's worth the journey, I assure you."

Blanche heard her brother say as she was leaving the room. And not a little did she desire to know what had been the reply. She scarcely wished in the affirmative; for although, as she had assured Mrs. Turner, she was fully convinced Edward was not a coxcomb, he was certainly inclined to be satirical; and she felt no ambition that the eccentricities both of her father and her aunt should be displayed before a man who might despise the former for his

covetousness, and ridicule the latter for her many peculiarities.

"And your disposition is really impatient?" asked Edward, when the ceremony of mounting was completed, and they were riding slowly across the park.

Blanche smiled as she replied-

"I scarcely know whether I shall acknowledge the defect or not. Culprits are never expected to convict themselves."

- "Are you quite certain it is a defect?"
- "Do you not think so?"
- "No—or, if quickness of temper be a fault, it is one we so often find joined to warmth of heart, that I should never quarrel with it."
- "But a woman should be meek and gentle, should she not?"
- "Yes to be sure," cried Godfrey; "all cheerfulness and good temper; never without a smile upon her countenance."
- "No, not for me. If there be one thing in the world I most especially eschew, it is an ever smiling woman."

"A woman never looks so well as when she is smiling," persisted Godfrey; "provided here teeth are good. If she hasn't good teeth, she had better keep her mouth shut; but if she has—by Jove," continued the sailor with increasing animation, "I believe a pretty, lively good-tempered girl might smile me out of anything."

"Such a girl as Harriet Brownlow," whise pered Blanche.

"Pooh—Harriet Brownlow; what's Harriet Brownlow to me? I wasn't thinking of Harriet Brownlow," said Godfrey, pushing harrist horse forward.

"Mr. Vavasour," said Blanche, stroking the arched neck of a steed many women would hardly have ventured to ride, "you have thought the peculiarities, the peculiarity at least, of my character worthy investigations; may I retaliate—do as much by yours?"

"Surely," he answered, looking very mu ch amused.

"You will not be offended?"

Not unless you judge me with over much severity; and even in that case, I should, I believe, be more hurt than angry."

- "Nay, I mean only to ask one question precisely as you did."
 - "Measure for measure."
 - "Exactly."
 - "Well, and that question?"
 - "I want to test the truth of an opinion I once heard past respecting you. Curiosity is, you are aware, one of the great attributes of women."
 - "It is said to be so."
 - "May I ask my question?"
 - "By all means.
 - "Well then, are you not naturally a little inclined to inflexibility, especially when the forgiveness of an injury is in question? Is it so?"
 - "I never have been injured," Edward answered with a touch of gravity. He had expected some light charge of conceit or cox-

combry; not an accusation of thus serious a nature. "I never have been injured, and therefore cannot possibly decide on my claim to placability."

"But are you easily induced to yield?"

"To one I loved, I would yield everything,"
Edward replied, still with gravity.

Blanche saw that he was not pleased, and she began to fear for his temper; an apprehension, not a little strengthened by the uneasy manner in which his horse went during the next quarter of an hour; and she wished she had not ventured the interrogation.

"It was not Warleigh passed that judgment on me?" Edward asked, suddenly.

"Lord Warleigh? Oh no. It was a friend of mine, whose name I cannot honourably give."

Edward glanced towards Godfrey.

"No, nor Godfrey. Your critic is a lady."

"Indeed!" and Edward's countenance bright ened; a woman's opinion was of small importance in his estimation.

Within a short distance of the lodge they met a tilbury driven by a middle-aged man, whose coarse features and cunning expression of countenance bespoke at once vulgarity of mind, low birth, and knavish disposition; while the exceedingly flaunty dress of his companion as decidedly proclaimed her a parvenue. Both bowed, or rather nodded, to Blanche, although they had never met before; and pulling up his clumsy horse, the male occupant of the carriage addressed Edward Vavasour in a tone of rough familiarity bordering on insolence: the female meanwhile simpered, and looking languishing, added from time to time a sort of treble to his bass.

"Fine day this-rather warm."

"Oh dear yes; absolutely overcoming. I hope Mr. Vavasour's quite well. I'm afraid dear old gentleman, this heat must be very bad for his liver. I couldn't sleep a wink all night: did nothing but think about him. And I said to Mr. Tomlinson this morning——"

join Blanche and Godfrey, who slowly on; but the gig was so pl his passage.

"I needn't inquire for your quite well I see," rejoined Mrs "We were on our way to call upo Again Edward slightly incline

Again Edward slightly incline and again, he vainly tried to pass.

"Hope Miss Vavasour will be to consider this a visit."

Edward made no reply, his seemed bent on joining his comp Mr. Tomlinson, seeing his object horse, and thus allowed him to att

"Who is that who has been :

ward's hand been one second later in seizing the bridle, very serious consequences might have followed.

Confound the scoundrel's insolence," exclaimed Godfrey; while Edward's dark cheek turned pale with rage.

Nay, nay," said Blanche, "the fault was me—it was indeed. A fly had settled on Glow-worm's neck, and in my hurry to rid her the annoyance, I touched her rather too smartly with the whip. Be quiet, my pretty Glow-worm. I did not mean to hurt you."

"Are you hurt yourself, Blanche?"

" No, Godfrey, not in the least."

"Or alarmed?" asked Edward. "Yes, you must be. Perhaps, we had better give up our visit to Conyngsby, for to-day, at least."

"Not on my account; I assure you, I never felt more valiant in my life. But you have not yet told me the name of my new acquaintance." "Aye," cried Godfrey, emphatically, "who are they? The man seems a rum sort of fellow; and as for the woman—I don't think, Blanche, that you and she are likely to make much of an intimacy of it."

"Tomlinson is, or rather was, a sort of steward to my father."

"Whew—" said Godfrey—"Mr. Vavasour's steward—and he talks of bringing his wife to call upon my sister? Is it usual down here for gentry of that description to claim acquaintance with the ladies of the family?"

Edward looked vexed.

"Miss Vavasour will not, of course, return the visit."

"Nay, nay," said Blanche, "it was intended as a civility, and therefore must be acknowledged as such; although, I must own, I saw nothing attractive either in Mr. Tomlinson—is not that the name?—or his lady."

"No, no, Blanche, I shan't allow you to go there."

"Nor I, either," added Edward. "Mrs. Tomlinson has been guilty of impertinence, not civility, in intruding her acquaintance on you."

"Perhaps, it was ignorance which prompted her."

"No; the wife of a man who was once serrant to my father, must be perfectly well aware that she is not a fitting associate for you. But she is very pushing and intrusive. So, dear Miss Vavasour, you must do nothing to encourage her advances."

"If that fellow were once a servant, I wonder he does not know better how to drive."

"He was not my father's groom, but his valet, and went abroad with him. Soon after his return, he was made steward of the property; and for many years oppressed the tenantry, and cheated his employer."

"How singular," said Blanche, "that so benevolent a character as Mr. Vavasour should have suffered his tenants to be injured. I can

understand his blindness and indifference to his own interests, but not that he should allow those dependent on him to suffer."

"I often made the same remark; and as soften tried to shake the influence this man exercised over my father—but in vain. My remonstrances were nothing. Neither did these complaints which poured in from all sides avail in breaking the thraldom in which has a kept my father. It was, in fact, an infatuation I could never comprehend, nor in the slightest at manner account for; and even now, although he is no longer steward, having himself resigned the charge, his power at Newstokese Priors is greater than mine."

"How very strange!" cried Blanche; with he more energy than she perhaps suspected.

"Yes; it is strange. But," added Edward, dropping his voice, so that his words reached only Blanche; "my father is often singular; there are many extraordinary traits in his character. The caprice which sometimes tincture

his bearing towards me, the apparent want of affection—but it is not for me, his son, to speak of his peculiarities."

"What an odd thing influence is," said Godfrey. "And often quite unaccountable."

"I am not sure," answered Blanche, "that I altogether subscribe to your opinion. I think, that in all cases, influence may be traced either to superiority of mind, or circumstance."

"Sometimes to impudence alone," Godfrey replied.

"True; the modest and unassuming are not unfrequently led by their inferiors both in mind and disposition."

"And the indolent by the more energetic."

"That last assertion, Mr. Vavasour, supports my theory. Energy is, surely, an evidence of moral superiority," Blanche remarked.

Edward assented; in fact, he seldom for any length of time, maintained an opinion in opposition to his pretty cousin. And, perhaps,

it was this deference to her judgment or taste, which rendered him so interesting to Fac. For, surely, it was very gratifying to a girl of Blanche's age, indeed it would have been to a woman of any age, to find a man of Edward's highly intellectual mind not only anxious to amuse, but willing to be convinced by her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ABBIVED at Conyngsby Park, they were informed that the mistress of the mansion was at home; and on being ushered into the drawing room, they found her seated at a table on which was placed a phrenological head; but whether she had been studying that acquirement, or whether she was writing or working, was uncertain; the necessary implements for all being before her.

On a stool at her feet sat a little girl with a piece of carpet work in her hand; at a short distance, another was employed amusing herself with colouring prints; and, on the ground, a boy of about four years old was engaged with one of those white wooden dogs, whose squeak-

ing so enchants the childish ear, and so distresses irritable nerves.

Blanche's reception was not untinctured by embarrassment. Mrs. Revely had called upon Miss Vavasour, but she was not at home. They were, therefore, still personally unacquainted. Edward forgot to introduce his cousin; and as Mrs. Revely's manner was shy and awkward, to a degree not often to be met with, even in the lady of a country squire, she did not remedy the oversight. After bestowing upon Miss Vavasour much such a salutation as she might have given a well dressed female swindler, or any other doubtful character, she stared at Godfrey, then shaking Edward warmly by the hand, dropped once more upon the sofa, and addressing herself exclusively to Mr. Vavasour, commenced a series of inquiries respecting his father and one or two mutual acquaintances residing in the village, which clustered around Newstoke Priors.

Blanche beckoned one of the little girls to-

wards her, whilst Godfrey offered a similar invitation to the little boy. Both were unavailing. Blanche's protégée only hung her head closer to her drawing-paper, whilst Master Charles, whom Godfrey had ventured to touch with the point of his riding switch, gave a sort of shriek, and making the best of his way towards his mother, hid his face upon her lap. Instantly checking a very prosy history she was giving Edward, Mrs. Revely directed all her attention to the child; soothing and petting him as though some serious injury had been inflicted or intended.

"Your little boy is shy," said Edward, after a short time.

"Dear, do you think Charlie shy? All my children are usually remarked for their good, easy, manners. I always make companions of them. Look up, Charlie dear, look up."

"Perhaps, he is unaccustomed to strangers."

"What's the matter, my own Charlie?" whispered Mrs. Revely.

Instead of answering, Charlie moved to his sister's side, and began muttering to her.

"What is it, Elizabeth?" asked Mrs. Revely.

Elizabeth laughed; and, in her turn, whispered to her sister; who, with an air of great amusement, almost screamed:

- "Mama, Charlie says, he doesn't like that gentleman, because he smells so odd."
- " My dear Amelia!" expostulated Mrs. Revely; while Godfrey absolutely blushed.
- "Yes, mama," cried Charlie, "he does indeed—he smells like my thick shoes."
- "Oh, the blacking! The blacking on your boots, I suppose," said Mrs. Revely. "They really do use such deleterious ingredients in the composition of every article, now."
- "Mama," asked the eldest girl, "what's blacking made of?"

"Blacking is composed of various substances; but as it is often patent—for, you are aware, there are many different sorts of blacking—are you not, Amelia?"

Amelia was not aware of this peculiarity concerning blacking; but she saw that non-acquaintance with the fact implied ignorance; so she answered boldly,—

" Yes."

Whereupon, her mother recommenced her lecture; and after descanting for at least ten minutes on the subject, left it very nearly where she began; for, as she truly enough remarked, patent compositions are usually kept secret. And, beyond a supposition, that lampblack was one of the ingredients employed in making blacking, Mrs. Revely had not even a suspicion on this interesting subject.

But she looked very wise while she was speaking, and the two girls looked equally sapient while listening. Mrs. Revely, therefore, fancied she had considerably enlarged their infant capacities, and that their young ideas had shot up amazingly in consequence of the discussion. She thought, likewise, that it was very delightful to be the mother of a child endued with so inquiring a mind as her Amelia. Then, glancing from this interesting young lady to the bust which stood before her, she asked Godfrey if he were a phrenologist.

Two motives urged this question—the one, civility; the other, parental vanity. Her children had all of them very remarkably constructed heads; so, at least, Mrs. Revely had been informed, as, I believe, is frequently the case; there being no vehicle for flattery more common or easy than phrenology, when people have their own or their children's heads inspected: whence, perhaps, its popularity.

"No," Godfrey answered, with a smile, which had in it a shadow of contempt. "Those sort of studies have hardly come in my way. My sister, however, understands something of phrenology."

Mrs. Revely turned towards Blanche. "It is a most interesting study, and highly beneficial in the formation of character."

"I have found the study of phrenology interesting," Blanche answered; "but beyond amusement, I cannot boast of any advantage I have derived from following it."

"You surprise me! But, perhaps, you have no younger sisters, whose dispositions you are auxious to correct."

"No; I have not the happiness of having a sister; I am an only daughter."

"Mama," said Elizabeth, eagerly; "what did Mr. Silver say about my head? Didn't he say I've got a better conscience than Amelia?"

" No, Elizabeth, he didn't," cried Amelia.

" He did, I say."

"He didn't. Mama! mama! who has the best conscience, Elizabeth or me?"

"I think, my dear Amelia, Mr. Silver certainly did say that the organ of conscientiousness in Elizabeth's head was better developed than in yours. But, she is older, you know two years older; and if you are careful, and take pains—"

"Besides," interrupted Amelia, "I've got a better superciliousness than Lizzy."

"Superciliousness, Amelia!" said the mother, gravely. "There is no such organ. What can you possibly mean?"

"Mama," replied the child, in some confusion, "I mean—I mean, that bump which is near the middle of the forehead; not quite in the middle, but near it."

" Comparison, perhaps?"

"Yes, comparison. Mr. Silver said, I had a great deal more comparison than Lizzy."

"That appears a singular projection," observed Edward, pointing to Amelia's temples, where a very considerable enlargement was obvious.

"Yes," replied her mother, with a little hesitation; "Amelia has those organs well developed." "What are they?"

As Mrs. Revely did not answer, Blanche replied.

- "The organs of gustativeness are supposed to lie there."
 - " What is their office?"
 - "They regulate our taste regarding food."
- "Ah, prove our claim to epicurism," Edward added.
 - " Blanche, is that the case?" asked Godfrey.
- "I believe phrenologists, that is to say, some of them, place the organs of gustativeness in that region; but it is a point on which they are not unanimous. Mr. Combe—"

At this moment, the luncheon bell was heard, and seldom did summons to the eating table prove more welcome. The children were hungry, as children always are. The Vavasour party, glad of any change; and Mrs. Revely was well pleased that a conversation which did not display her daughters to advantage, should be dropped.

An adjournment to the dining-room was proposed and agreed to; but full ten minutes elapsed before the movement could be completed. It was necessary that Master Charlie's pinafore should be donned; and his sisters' hands were supposed to require ablution. Neither party, however, considered pinafore or lavation needful; and as Mrs. Revely coaxed, expostulated, but never dreamt of adverting to authoritative language, Blanche began to think the point at issue must be conceded to the young disputants, when a bigger boy burst into the room, exclaiming,—

"Mama, Lucy's canary-bird has hatched three young ones, and they look so funny without their feathers. We've all been looking at them; but Miss Swansea says we mustn't watch too much, or the old birds will not feed them properly, and she's going to lock the door and let nobody into the room.

"Oh," cried Amelia, "how ill-natured!"

[&]quot;But she hasn't done it yet; Mary, and

Sarah, and Hannah are all there, and if you run fast, you'll be in time to see them."

Off went Amelia and her sister; and a whisper from Charlie's nurse that he should see the canary-birds for ever so long when nobody else was in the room, induced that sturdy young gentleman to waive his objection to his pinafore.

In the dining-room, they were joined by Miss Swansea and her charge, full, of course, of the canary's late exploit; and Mrs. Revely forgot half the customary courtesies of the luncheon-table in her anxiety to improve this most interesting event. Many were the questions asked, and wearisome the information given in reply, respecting the hatching and rearing of young birds. Every incident of life being, as Mrs. Revely averred, capable of being improved.

"Miss Swansea, how beautiful those roses look," timidly observed a quiet little girl; in Blanche's eyes, the most interesting looking of the group, but evidently not the mother's pride.

Miss Swansea did not answer; worn out by a long morning's teaching, she had fallen into a state of dreamy listlessness, and did not hear her pupil's observation. Perhaps, poor thing, her thoughts were in another place, and by another dinner table, where loved familiar faces were assembled. Where her own mother presided, and her own little sisters sat around.

"They are very pretty," said Blanche, who sat opposite. "Are you fond of flowers, dear?"

Sarah coloured and looked down, and her eldest sister answered for her.

"Yes, Miss Vavasour, Sarah is very fond of flowers. She's got a garden where she works for hours; and she helps Miss Swansea with her herbal. I'm not fond of flowers; I don't care a bit about them."

"Sarah," said Mrs. Revely; "can you tell what class the rose belongs to?"

"What class, mama?"

"Yes, my dear; the botanical name of the flower, and the class to which it belongs. No, Lucy, I don't ask you, but Sarah."

Sarah knew well enough at other times; but, now, before strangers, she found her memory entirely defective; and although Miss Swansea, starting from her reverie, prompted the necessary information, Sarah had not courage to pronounce the words. Mrs. Revely bit her lips and looked towards Lucy, who, evidently burning to display her knowledge, shouted forth "Polyandria." Miss Swansea corrected the mistake; Blanche could not forbear a smile, while Edward hoping to bring on something like conversation, began speaking of the immense horticultural improvement incident to our day.

"Yes, there is a great deal done to improve flowers now, certainly," said Mrs. Revely, still looking towards Lucy, until her eye was caught by Henry's plate—"Henry, you must not eat such a quantity of gooseberry tart. Miss Swansea, pray don't allow him. He will make himself quite ill; Dr. S. particularly prohibited all fruit tarts and puddings."

"Miss Swansea," inquired Amelia; "what's the reason rose trees don't have fruit like pears and apples?"

"Because they're not fruit trees, to be sure," retorted Henry. "What a spoony you must be."

"But they have flowers, and I think it's very odd they should'nt have fruit."

"My dear Amelia," interposed Mrs. Revely, and her daughter having turned her head, that anxious parent proceeded to explain the difference between the ornamental flowering shrub, and its more useful, but less beautiful, sister.

Amelia appeared to listen, while Henry helped himself furtively to some more of the forbidden tart.

"Henry, there's papa," cried Lucy. And Henry tossed an enormous spoonful of the dainty into his mouth. Mr. Revely's approach was subject of pleasure both to his lady and her guests: for, in addition to being a most devoted mother, Mrs. Revely was an exceedingly affectionate wife; and the others trusted that, as far as conversation was concerned, he would occasion a diversion in their favour.

But they were utterly mistaken. Mr. Revely happened to be to the full as anxious respecting the bodily health of his offspring, as Mrs. Revely was for their mental cultivation; and after hurrying through the usual courtesies he gave his whole attention to his children's looks and plates. Henry's gooseberry tart did not, of course, escape; Sarah was blamed for having eaten strawberries; Elizabeth mashed potatoes; and a half-empty custard cup beside Miss Swansea, occasioned many glances of surprise. Perhaps these would have been rebukes, but for the presence of the Newstoke party. Whether custard disagreed with Miss Swansea or not, Mr. Revely considered that she

was wrong in eating it: on the score of example alone she should have practised abstinence.

Godfrey's patience having manifestly long since taken wing, Blanche felt their speedy departure alone would prevent a public exhibition of his annoyance; she turned therefore to Edward, intending to beg the horses might be ordered round. He was not speaking—and he looked again as she had seen him look at Lady Alicia Raby's dinner party; but, instead of blaming, she now admired the loftiness of mind which led him, on that occasion, to despise the frivolity displayed in a fashionable coterie, as much as he now clearly contemned the absurdity and weakness by which he was surrounded.

A train of thought, thus flattering to Edward Vavasour, was broken by an inquiry addressed by Mrs. Revely to Godfrey.

- "Are you fond of children, Mr. Vavasour?"
- " Exceedingly. I like them very much,

indeed; especially when well boiled and served up with abundance of parsley and butter."

The little Revelys, those, at least, who had heard the question and reply, looked perfectly aghast; whilst their mama evidently debated within herself whether a real cannibal was seated near her, or whether Mr. Vavasour had mistaken her interrogation. The last hypothesis, of course, prevailed. The sarcasm conveyed in Godfrey's singular answer was lost to all excepting his relatives and Miss Swansea. Blanche caught Edward's eye—he read her wish to return home, and the horses were ordered.

While waiting their appearance, the whole party rose from table, and dispersed about the lawn and shrubbery. Blanche, of necessity, walked by Mrs. Revely; and as none of the children happened to follow close, and the elder lady's attention was, consequently, free, she made one or two remarks, which really

proved her at least as sensible as the majority of women. Blanche was beginning to be interested; almost to regret that her visit was nearly over; when they were overtaken by Amelia, breathless, and in a state of great excitement:—

"Mama, mama, Henry's swinging Charlie, Henry's swinging Charlie!"

"Henry is swinging Charlie!" returned Mrs. Revely, in a voice of alarm.

"Yes, he is indeed. I told him not. I said you would be angry, but he wouldn't mind a word I said to him. Lizzy and Lucy lifted Charlie in, and Henry's swinging him."

"Where's Miss Swansea?" asked Mrs. Revely. "It really is very extraordinary she cannot be depended upon to watch the children even for ten minutes. Where is Miss Swansea? Run and tell Henry I wish him to desist. Gracious! what's that? Some accident has happened! My darling child!" and Mrs. Revely, naturally enough, ran in the direction of the swing,

whence screams, and other symptoms of distress, were heard proceeding.

Blanche, scarcely knowing whether her presence would be acceptable or not, was following at a more soher pace, when, suddenly, a bend in the path brought her in view of Edward Vavasour, walking beside Miss Swansea, and holding little Sarah's hand in his. They had just emerged from a cross walk, and, consequently, had not encountered Mrs. Revely. Surprise was the first emotion of Blanche's mind-surprise, that so timid a child should attach herself to the dignified, almost haughty looking, Edward. Surprise, moreover, that Miss Swansea and Mr. Vavasour, who had not hitherto appeared to know each other, should now be found walking together and engaged in familiar, and it would seem, interesting conversation; for all the languor and melancholy, hitherto so conspicuous in Miss Swansea's features, had given place to a flush of pleasure and animation.

Edward, however, was not, apparently, in one of his haughty moods; indeed, there was so much gentleness, both of manner and expression, that Miss Vavasour's astonishment gave way to a vague, and most disagreeable suspicion. She forgot all about the swing and Charlie's misfortune, and had she not been too near, would have retreated.

"Miss Swansea," said Edward, "allow me to introduce my cousin, who will, I am sure, be delighted to make your acquaintance, and to see you at Newstoke Priors, should you call while she is there. Blanche, Miss Swansea is an old friend of mine."

Blanche held out her hand, and with the utmost cordiality. Mr. Vavasour's voice had rather faltered in uttering the concluding sentence. It was clear his feelings were much interested, and Blanche could not fail to echo the emotion. Then he had called her Blanche—and never had his voice appeared so musical before. She was gratified, also, by the appeal

which he had made, and by his manner of preferring it. "Miss Swansea is a friend of mine; as such, she should be yours." He, then, considered that unanimity of feeling ought to exist between them. Besides all this, Blanche was a warm-hearted being, who could sympathise with Mrs. Revely's governess, or with any other governess uncomfortably situated; and she addressed Miss Swansea with courtesy and frankness. Not condescension; that would have been misplaced.

They were interrupted almost immediately.

"Miss Swansea," cried Amelia, running up,
"Miss Swansea, mama wants you. Charles
has fallen out of the swing, and he's very much
hurt; and mama says, you must come this instant, for she wants a letter written to Mr.
Philpott."

[&]quot;Where is your mama?"

[&]quot; In the drawing-room."

[&]quot;Is your brother really hurt? And where?" inquired Blanche, while they all quickened their pace.

"He's knocked his head a little, but it does not bleed."

" Then there's not much the matter."

"Oh, no, nothing at all; only Charlie makes such a fuss about every thing."

They reached the drawing-room. Mrs. Revely, seated on an ottoman, held Charlie in her arms; soothing, kissing, in fact encouraging, instead of repressing cries, which evidently did not proceed from pain. An elderly woman was busy applying brown paper, soaked in vinegar, to the child's forehead. Such of the Misses and Masters Revely as had not been engaged in the delinquency which led to his misfortune, were grouped around their mother; while the head of the house, unable to postpone Mr. Philpott's summons until Miss Swansea's arrival, was occupied in writing it.

No sort of attention was paid to the newcomers, excepting by Mrs. Fielding, the head nurse; who, better bred than her employers, suspended her operations, and drew herself a little on one side, in order that Miss Vavasour might see what a dreadful accident had happened to Master Charles.

"Can I be of any use?" Miss Swansea timidly inquired, at last.

"Oh dear no; pray don't trouble yourself. Mr. Revely has, I believe, written for Philpott; and till he comes, I dare say we shall be able to manage pretty well."

"If we can only keep off fever," observed Mr. Revely, folding the note he had been writing.

"Don't cry, Charlie, my sweet fellow," said Mrs. Revely, kissing the child's shoulder. "I know it hurts you very much. Fielding, this paper is nearly dry. How unlucky to be sure. But you won't go in that nasty swing again, will you, darling? Fielding, you'll see that he doesn't. In future, I shall depend entirely on you. Miss Swansea, don't go away. I dare say I shall want you presently. Fielding, can't Miss Swansea hold the saucer for you?"

"No, ma'am, thank you; I can manage

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quite well. Fielding answered, as poor Miss Swansea offered her assistance.

- Miss Swansea, then, you had better go. I think it must be school-time," and Miss Swansea vanished.

Considering Master Charles's age, Blanche could not forbear thinking that Mrs. Fielding was, in reality, the guilty party. But, to her, not an upbraiding word, or even look, was addressed by either parent. In fact, she was, in their eyes, a valuable servant, and, as such, greatly favoured. Moreover, Fielding knew her value. She would not have borne one tithe of the scolding and lecturing that were heaped upon the unhappy governess.

CHAPTER XIX.

What a relief was it to Blanche to find herself away from that noisy drawing-room, and guiding pretty Glow-worm, or rather suffering her to pick her steps, over moss and turf, and "hillock green," on their road back to Newstoke.

"Blanche," cried Godfrey, "if you can't contrive to manage your children better than those people do, don't expect any fat legacies from their old bachelor uncle, the admiral; I was never more thoroughly bored in my whole life. What an ass that woman is!"

"Our visit has not certainly proved very entertaining. Poor Mrs. Revely appears scarcely

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===

nt have a through beyond the nursery or schoolroom. Form is her husband any wiser?"

- * When No-he's worse, a thousand times man she as People coght not to admit visiters mass they're prepared to pay them common multip."
- Third perhaps you will say," added Edvarid addressing Blanche. "that other people, who may be supposed to be well advised on the subject, should not decoy their friends into many upon such theroughly dull beings as the Barrelys. But, to say the truth, I have had vary little personal acquaintance with these people."
- The colors she answered, "I entirely acquit you and so does Godfrey. The visit was the of recessity. Had Mrs. Revely been a Hawking, as she had called on me, I was bound to return the civility. And, after all, perhaps, we should not criticise too severely; her motive, I suppose, is good, al-

though its working may not be agreeable, Maternal solicitude—"

" Say rather, selfishness."

"Nay, nay, you are worse than Godfrey, and with less provocation. On you, at all events, Mrs. Revely bestowed a tolerable share of attention; I think you ought to defend her."

"I shall not, however. In spite of the distinction she made in my favour, which, by the bye, was most excessively ill-bred, I maintain, that in everything we saw at Conyngsby Park, there was quite as much of selfishness as of anxiety for her family. It gratified Mrs. Revely to display her children's acquirements, and therefore it was done."

"Or attempted," said Blanche, laughing.

"You are right; it was but an attempt. Again, Mrs. Revely found more pleasure in giving her attention to her children, who are in fact a portion of herself, than to her guests; and the inclination was indulged

What is all this but selfishness, as well as ill-breeding?"

"It is a very common display of selfishness, at any rate."

"Exceedingly. There are a number of women who would not dream of continuing to work, or read, or write, during their reception of a visiter; and yet, who will not hesitate to give two thirds, if not more, of their attention to their children; nor for a moment suspect that they are not conducting themselves in a perfectly lady-like manner."

"If," said Godfrey, "mothers choose to be always surrounded by a troop of children, they ought to shut their doors on all but relations and intimate friends."

" Or, at all events," Blanche answered,
teach their children to behave properly."

"Very true; I never felt more awkward than when that confounded little monkey, Master Charlie, passed his strictures on my boots. Young rascal, he deserved to have had his ears soundly boxed."

"Before strangers, it would not be easy to correct a child; and that is one evil of Mrs. Revely's system," Edward answered.

"Besides, I really believe, she thought he had said something wonderfully wise; but that's not extraordinary, for she's next door to a fool herself."

"When Mrs. Revely and I were alone, she made some observations which proved her naturally to be very far from weak; but, I suppose, constant intercourse with children has dwarfed her intellect," Blanche remarked, and Edward answered—

"I know an instance where such has been pre-eminently the case. My friend Warleigh's mother, although naturally a woman of very superior mind, has, by continually living with and teaching a large family of young children, necessarily adapting her capacity to theirs, so lowered and contracted her intellect, that she

really has become little better than a child herself; unable to converse on any subjects but such as relate to education—elementary education — for as the pupils are in the course of time transferred to a governess or public school, she, poor woman, is always hammering away at the A, B, C, part of the business."

"Lord Warleigh, however, reflects some credit on his mother's management," said Blanche.

"She had very little to do with Warleigh. He was educated by his uncle, the late Lord," Edward replied. And for a few minutes silence followed.

"How I pity that Miss Swansea," said Blanche; not, however, moved entirely by the sentiment she avowed.

"Yes," replied Edward, "she is greatly to be pitied; all governesses are to be pitied. I remember hearing of one who affirmed, that were it not for the humiliation of holding intercourse with the men servants, she would have brought up her daughter as a lady's maid, in preference to her being a governess."

"Don't you think," asked Miss Vavasour, "that governesses owe a great portion of the mortifications and annoyances of which they complain, to their own mismanagement? I think, that were I obliged to act in that capacity, I should choose a line of tactics totally the reverse from that usually pursued. They complain of being overlooked and slightedwell-I would make myself of consequence, not by seeking publicity, but by insisting on retirement. Instead of stipulating to be considered one of the family, and as such allowed to appear in the drawing-room, as so many governesses do, I would make it a condition of my engagement, that I should never be expected to leave my own peculiar territorythe school-room. And, I fancy, that if I adhered to this arrangement; if I rigidly maintained my farouche determination, the very love of opposition, the desire of obtaining that which it is difficult to have, would make people covet my sweet company; and instead of being voted an intrusion, my presence would be reckoned quite a compliment — my society eagerly sought after. In a word, I should be thought a very charming person, only because I proved myself indifferent."

"Your calculation is, I dare say, correct; as far, at least, as concerns the result," Edward answered, in a low tone of voice.

"That's a nice, quiet, little girl, that Sarah," said Godfrey, who rode, as he generally did, a little in advance of the other two.

"Very," responded Edward. "I can fancy her growing up into precisely such a woman as a man would like to marry; quiet, ladylike, and gentle."

"Not like me; mine is not a gentle disposition," was Blanche's involuntary mental comment; and she was going to put a direct question respecting Miss Swansea, when she found herself forestalled by Godfrey.

"Do you know anything about that girl? The governess, I mean."

"A great deal. She is the eldest daughter of a clergyman, who was my tutor during a year and half. He was a man of some private fortune, and good, at least fair connexions, but dreadfully extravagant; in fact, died insolvent, leaving a widow and six, or I believe, seven children, all younger than Miss Swansea; the greater number girls, who must, like her, make their own way in the world."

"Is it long since you have seen each other?" asked Blanche; "because at first, you did not appear to know Miss Swansea."

"I have not seen Mary Swansea for many years. That, however, was not my motive for not accosting her; for her's is not a face which can be easily forgotten; but as she did not acknowledge me, I scarcely knew how far, under present circumstances, she would wish

our former acquaintance to be carried on.

After luncheon, however, I chanced to cross
her path; we spoke, and were old friends
again, and talking over old times in a few
minutes,"

Edward gave this explanation with entire frankness; yet it did not altogether satisfy his cousin. She was languid and out of spirits that evening. Edward remarked it.

"Glow-worm frightened me a little," she answered, inconsiderately enough.

"Ah, that blackguard, Tomlinson!"

"Indeed, Mr. Vavasour, he was not in fault."

"You are extremely charitable," Edward said, ironically.

"Where a warm-hearted, and sometimes warm-headed, young man, such as Godfrey might be implicated, is it not better to place the most favourable construction on that which will bear two meanings? Granting that Mr. Tomlinson's awkward driving were the occa-

sion of Glow-worm's indecorum, it does not follow, that the (what shall I call it?) the collision was intentional on his part."

"What's all that, Blanche?" inquired the elder Mr. Vavasour. "Did you meet Tom-linson, this morning?"

Blanche hastened to reply. She saw that the circumstance must be narrated, and she believed her own version very much the safest.

But notwithstanding all her caution, Mr. Vavasour guessed the real fact; and for a few minutes his indignation was excessive. That Mrs. Tomlinson, who had been nothing but a nursery maid, should have presumed to intrude her acquaintance on Miss Vavasour—that her husband should have been guilty of such disrespect, appeared in the old gentleman's estimation, delinquencies so enormous, that, when after giving vent to various expressions of contemptuous indignation, Mr. Vav asour laid his

hand upon the bell-rope, Blanche really began to apprehend he meditated some act of retribution. At the very least she expected to hear Mr. Tomlinson summoned into his former master's presence; and dreading the effect of all this upon Godfrey, who would naturally resent an insult offered to his sister, should Tomlinson's awkwardness be allowed to be intentional, she was about to join her brother who was sauntering on the lawn, where she hoped to detain him till the matter should be dropped, when to her equal astonishment and relief of mind, Mr. Vavasour suddenly checked himself.

"After all, it might be only accident," he muttered, returning to his easy chair. "It might be only accident. That fellow doesn't know how to manage a horse. How should he? Blockhead as he always was. As for his abominable impudence in bringing his wife here, that, Edward, is your fault."

- "My fault, Sir?"
- "Yes, Sir, your fault."
- "Indeed, I am not aware-"
- "Whether you are, or not, it matters little. I tell you, Miss Vavasour owes that indignity to you. However, it might have been worse. Mrs. Tomlinson might have accosted her in some public place, or have done many things more objectional than merely calling: and as there has been no introduction—I suppose you didn't introduce Mrs. Tomlinson to Miss Vavasour?"
- "No, Sir, I did not," Edward answered.

 "Putting all other considerations on one side, with the feelings I entertain towards Tomlinson, it was hardly likely I should further an acquaintance between my cousin and his wife."
- "Well then, the matter's at an end. There's no occasion to return the visit; cool contempt is the proper mode of meeting

such insolence. Blanche, my dear, of course you won't think of calling on that woman; she's not a fit companion for you. Nothing but a lady's maid;—confound his impudence for thinking she'd a right to visit my relations. Yes—ring the bell, Edward; it's time for tea: and Blanche, you must sing to me, my dear; my head aches this evening and I can't bear conversation."

Blanche fancied Edward's manner towards her a little touched with stiffness, during the remainder of that evening. Perhaps, the change was not altogether unnatural. She was the cause of Mr. Vavasour's singular outbreak; and although his excessive deference and affection for his father might prevent Edward's resenting the injustice of the accusation, it was not at all unlikely that the vexation he evidently felt, might render him less friendly towards her.

How much Blanche wished the Tomlinsons

had never thought of calling on her! It was so unpleasant to have the harmony of a small circle interrupted. Alas! there came an hour, when Blanche Vavasour found cause to deprecate still further Mr. Tomlinson's connexion with her family!

END OF VOL. I.

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NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

VOL. II.



NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

BY

JULIA RATTRAY WADDINGTON,

AUTHOR OF " MISREPRESENTATION," &c., &c.

" Gold-the rich man's idol, and the poor man's dream."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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NEWSTOKE PRIROS.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT a fortnight after Edward Vavasour's return to Newstoke Priors, Blanche received the following communication from Miss Bransby.

"My dear Blanche,

"I saw in the papers, that Mr. Edward Vavasour had left London for Newstoke Priors, and your last letter to Mrs. Turner confirmed the statement. By the way, I must say that I consider your writing to her instead of your father, or me, or Arthur, very extraordinary.

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It would surely have been more becoming a girl of your age to have addressed the only letter you have thought proper to write since you have been at Newstoke Priors to a member of your own family; and I fear this strange oversight looks very much as if you were neglecting the golden opportunity before you of advancing both your father's and your brother's interests. However, I shall say nothing further on this subject, as the object of my writing is not to jog your memory, but to state, that we, that is Mrs. Turner and I, think it high time you should be coming home. Your father has been very ailing lately; and I doubt whether it is quite correct for you to remain at Newstoke Priors, as there is no female head to the establishment. It is, therefore, desirable that you hasten your return to Marshampton. Of course, if any particular benefit is likely to arise from your staying longer at Newstoke Priors, you had better stop. Of this you must be the best judge. Above all things, be

careful not to offend either of the Mr. Vavasours. If there should appear any great difficulty about your getting away, you can say your father is unwell, and that I have written to desire your return. Love to Godfrey and yourself,

Ever your affectionate aunt,

LETITIA BRANSBY."

"Marshampton, Tuesday."

"This must be Mrs. Turner's doing," thought Blanche, a little pettishly.

And so, in truth, it was. Mrs. Turner, entirely alive to her pupil's enthusiastic turn of mind, and struck by one or two very energetic expressions contained in the letter which had occasioned such umbrage to Miss Bransby, felt that the writer's present position might be, perhaps, more pleasant than secure; and full of this impression, she urged on aunt Letitia's mind an objection to Blanche's longer resi-

dence at Newstoke Priors, not altogether without foundation.

But it mattered little with whom the summons home originated; and not much more, whether obedience to the mandate should prove agreeable or not. Such obedience must be rendered, and the only remaining question was, in what manner Mr. Vavasour should be informed of his young guests' intended departure. The difficulty was, in a great measure, obviated by the old gentleman himself.

"You have had unpleasant news to-day," he said, with the abruptnesss which sometimes marked his manner.

"Yes, I have heard from home, and my aunt writes me that my father has not been quite well lately," Blanche answered, with less than her usual candour. For most assuredly, the gravity which attracted Mr. Vavasour's attention, was derived from other sources than filial anxiety.

" Is your father seriously ill ?"

"My sunt does not say that, exactly. But -but-she is anxious that Godfrey and I should-"

"Should return home. Well—," the old man added, after a moody pause, "I suppose I mustn't try and keep you any longer; you'd better go — yes, yes, you'd better go. No good will happen from your staying here. That boy has disappointed me confoundedly."

The last words were uttered in a low tone of voice. Blanche applied them to her brother, and she answered eagerly:

"Godfrey! Oh, I hope Godfrey has done nothing to offend you."

"Godfrey-Godfrey," he replied, looking "cantly at her; "Godfrey, what of him?"

"Only that you said you were disappointed; and I was afraid that my brother might have been the means."

"Your brother? No, no; Godfrey's a fine manly, noble-hearted fellow—an honour to his

profession, and a credit to his family. It is not of him I was thinking. He's a fine young man, I say, and I'm sorry for his sake. But it's too late now;—the evil can't be remedied. And so, you're going? When do you go? To-morrow?"

Blanche had not fixed on any day; the necessity for so immediate a departure had not struck her.

"Yes, yes," pursued the old man; "go tomorrow. There's no use in your staying here, none whatever;" and he quitted the room, leaving his young kinswoman excessively perplexed; for, although Mr. Vavasour was undeniably a very strange old gentleman, Blanche had never seen him half so strange as then.

The day passed heavily. Last days are almost always melancholy. Besides, Blanche had been happy at Newstoke Priors; and as the motive of her present recal must remain in force, at least, till Edward Vavasour married, she saw no present probability of her returning thither.

The evening was devoted, as it generally was, to music, of which Mr. Vavasour was passionately fond; and, seated near Blanche, he appeared to listen to the syren tones she uttered, with pleasure so intense, that it was almost painful. More than once, he sighed, and tears glistened beneath his shaggy eyelashes. The two young men lounged about, sometimes in the room, sometimes on the terrace; Edward paying Blanche little attention, except that he was usually at hand when the leaves of her music-book required to be turned.

Shortly before ten o'clock, the elder Mr. Vavasour retired; and very soon afterwards, Crawley, a favourite and confidential servant, nearly as old as the owner of the mansion, informed Blanche, in a mysterious manner, that his master desired to speak with her. She rose immediately, and was conducted to Mr. Vavasour's private sitting-room; a small, dismal apartment at the extremity of a

most animating and comfortless in the whole

"Tou wish to see me?" asked Blanche, observing an expression of considerable hesitation in Mr. Varnsour's countenance.

It is singular, nevertheless quite true, that in offering any thing for the acceptance of another, he the gift costly or be it not, the donor will often feel himself embarrassed—infinitely more embarrassed—than the object of his liberality. So it was just now with Mr. Vavasour. He took a black shagreen case from beneath some papers which lay scattered on a table, and without uttering a syllable, placed it in Blanche's hands.

" For me?" she inquired.

"Yes, yes, for you. You're young, and young people love gewgaws; so, perhaps, you'll sometimes wear what's in that box. I give it you to-night, because to-morrow, I mayn't see you before you go."

"Nay," answered Blanche, "we do not start so very early; I think Godfrey said the horses were ordered at eight."

"I know; but I mayn't be at home. You know I always like to ramble in the morning; it's the only time, this season of the year. when one can get a cool, refreshing walk. So take those ornaments, and wear them; or do whatever else you chance to fancy with them. And if ever you should want a friend, remember that you once saved an old man's worthless life."

"Indeed, dear Mr. Vavasour, you think too much of that poor act of mine."

"Ah!" said the old man, "I like to think of it. It's pleasant to feel one has been cared for—and yet, perhaps, it would have been as well for me if you and I, Blanche Vavasour, had never met. Now, good night. No, don't thank me for those jewels; they're trumpery; no use to me. Go to your room, and when you say your prayers (I suppose you always do say

them) ask a blessing for the old man whose life you saved. Aye, and for mercy also; for when a man has lived as long as I have done, and seen the things which I have seen, and been exposed to all that I have been exposed to, he may be tempted to do that which makes a death-bed terrible." So saying, he stroked back Blanche's hair, and gently kissed her snowy forehead.

She did retire, for her eyes were full of tears; and she scarcely knew how to answer her singular kinsman.

"Aye, aye," he muttered to himself, as Miss Vavasour withdrew; "her hair is soft and silky; and so was other hair which I remember; but that was black, yes, black like Edward's," and his eyes wandered to the picture hanging over the chimney piece.

"What have you there?" cried Godfrey, eagerly, on Blanche's re-appearance in the drawing-room.

She unfastened the casket.

"By Jove, those are handsome jewels. Are they yours?"

"Yes; Mr. Vavasour has given them to me."

"Uncommonly fine diamonds," resumed the sailor; who was, however, but an indifferent judge in such matters. The contents of the casket were very far from being either rare or costly; a circumstance which did not still diminish the gratitude Blanche felt towards her benefactor.

"Those ornaments were formerly my mother's," Edward remarked, carelessly; and Blanche's most expressive countenance betrayed that a fresh, and not an agreeable idea, had occurred to her.

Godfrey read what was passing in his sister's mind.

"Blanche thinks, Edward, that if those jewels were your mother's property, she has no right to profit by your father's generosity."

"I hope you are not rightly interpreting your sister's thoughts.

"Indeed he is," retorted Blanche. "I assure you, Mr. Vavasour, as these ornaments were once your mother's, I feel that they ought to belong to no one but—"

"Your wife," Godfrey added.

"If such be, indeed, Miss Vavasour's opinion, I can only say, that she is cherishing a scruple in favour of an imaginary personage."

"Yes, imaginary now."

"Well then, of a person who is, and will always be imaginary. I shall never marry."

"So I say," Godfrey replied, "and I think the resolution is wise enough for me, a poor lieutenant in his Majesty's service; although, I don't pretend to assert that I am likely to adhere to it; inasmuch, as I usually lose my heart to every pretty girl I happen to fall in with; and, if I met with any encouragement, should no doubt tell her so." "Aye," answered Edward, "you fall in love, and I do not, simply, because you cannot marry, and I can."

"You mean that the spirit of contradiction, proper to human nature, sways us both?"

"No. But that women as you see them are modest and retiring; the sought, and not the seekers. To me—"

"Mr. Vavasour," cried Blanche, "you're becoming severe; indeed, you are."

Edward smiled, and shook his head.

"I have been fairly hunted during four whole seasons."

"And like a stag at bay, you turn on your pursuers. Still, you should not be so very caustic in your philippics. You are aware this is not the first time I have heard you speak upon the subject, and I know what your opinion is."

"Have you never heard other men equally severe? For instance, Lord Warleigh?"

"No; I do not think I ever heard him

speak one word in our disparagement. But, perhaps," Blanche added, rather saucily, "Lord Warleigh has not undergone the same distressing persecution."

"Pardon me; as a more wealthy man, and, moreover, as the wearer of a coronet, he has fared worse than I have done."

"Then, he bears his evil treatment better; and if I might presume to offer advice, I should recommend your following his example. We gain nothing by thinking ill of our fellow creatures. Besides, in spite of all her faults and failings, woman is a very charming personage; as I remember reading once, 'The poetry of our every day existence, as man is its prose.'"

"Bravo, Blanche! Put that sentiment into the book which I'm quite sure you'll be fool enough to write some day or other."

"Dear Godfrey, I have told you it is not original."

" Never mind; in with it. Not one reader

in twenty will be wise enough to find out the plagiarism."

- "Or reviewer either," added Edward.
- "I will not, however, run the risk. If I ever do commit the absurdity, which you, Godfrey, seem to consider so inevitable; I will, at least, be quite original."
- "And in the mean time get off to bed. Remember, we start at eight o'clock precisely."

CHAPTER II.

BLANCHE obeyed her brother's directions; and although it was her last night at Newstoke Priors slept soundly; and, although she was a female, and a young one too, she was punctual the next morning.

She was, in fact, the first to enter the breakfast room. Godfrey followed, then Edward.

"Do you know," said the latter, addressing Blanche, whilst awaiting the arrival of the urn; "do you know, that in leaving Newstoke without having visited the far famed Wishing Well, you are guilty of a very serious omission? But, perhaps, you are ignorant both of the existence of that spot, and of your privilege connected with it."

"I know the Well, perfectly; for I have been there more than once: but my privilege -in what does my privilege consist?"

"In this: that if any true maiden of the Vavasour line, visit that spring while the dew be still lying; and kneeling reverently, after thrice repeating a wish—to herself, of course—drink of the spring, she is certain of seeing her desire accomplished."

"Is that really the case?"

"Undoubtedly it is. When duly tried, the power of the Wishing Well has never been known to fail. Now, will you, can you, forfeit this valuable privilege; one, too, which is peculiar to your sex; for it is only the ladies of our race, who are supposed to find favour with the fairy presiding over the spring. At any rate, won't you try your fortune? The Well is hardly ten minutes' walk from the end of the Terrace?"

"Pooh!" interrupted Godfrey, full of that fretful impatience so common with gentlemen,

when on the point of commencing a journey with female companions. "What can share have to wish for?"

"Nay, that is not my business to determine.

Is there, however, any person in the world who has not some wish, whose fulfilment would be a source of gratification?"

"But these things are all nonsense. Besides, we shall have the carriage at the door in less than half an hour?" said Godfrey, looking at his watch.

Edward threw open the window.

"The carriage may surely wait, and the morning is so delightful!"

Blanche appeared to entertain the same opinion.

"I have no faith in charms," she observed, at the same time, however, crossing the thresh-hold while the others followed. "I have no faith in charm, or fairy spell; but this delicious air and lovely prospect are irresistible temptations."

In truth the morning was one of summer's most beautiful—a little freshness in the breeze, a silver haze throughout the atmosphere, the note of the lingering summer bird, the hum of the busy summer insect, and the luscious fragrance of the luxuriant summer flower.

At the extremity of the terrace, Blanche stopped and glanced her eye around. She would scarcely suppress a sigh. Would she ever return to Newstoke; or, was this the last time she might gaze upon a place where she had been so very, very, happy?

They were not long in reaching the Well; a slender rill, which after crossing the emerald sward, emptied its clear waters into a marble basin; from whence, again escaping, it finally disappeared among the fissures of some broken ground. A gigantic oak, with its huge branches, overspread the reservoir, and formed its only canopy. On a dull wintry day, this had been a spot to fill the mind with sorrowful associations; for the tree had been struck by lightning,

and while some of the boughs still retained their full luxuriance of foliage, others were scathed, and leafless. Around the little font, the sullen ivy had entwined itself; the worn uneven edge was fringed with moss, and tawny, rust-like, spots mottled the surface of the stone.

But on the day Blanche visited the fairy haunted spot, the Wishing Well evoked no dark and gloomy musings; or if, indeed, it did inspire dreary fancies, it was a pleasing melancholy, a dreamy pensiveness, which inclined the mind to calm and holy meditation, rather than to sadness; for athwart the leafless branches laughing sunbeams fell; and the ivy, the moss, even the soil of time, were beautiful in contrast with the bright glories of the surrounding scene.

"Well, Blanche," said Godfrey, while his sister stood near the basin, and listened to the delicious murmuring of the water; "well, what do you mean to wish for? Nothing, I'll be bound. I'd wager any money, now, that, at this moment, you don't know what you wish."

"It is very true," Blanche answered, laughing; "I find some difficulty in deciding my choice; not, however, from the few, but the many, subjects for which my privilege might avail."

"Just like a woman; wanting all sorts of things, and yet not knowing her own mind after all."

"Or a child in a toyshop, unable to decide between a host of rival tempters."

"Well, make haste, at any rate."

"You are going to leave Newstoke," said Edward, observing that his cousin was still at a loss to choose. "You are on the point of quitting Newstoke; why not leave behind you friendly wishes for its inmates?"

"I will," Blanche answered; "I will wish every happiness to kind old Mr. Vavasour."

Edward bowed a little stiffly.

"As my father's representative suffer me to offer his acknowledgments. Nay, you must be bareheaded and kneeling; or the genius of the spot will not prove propitious."

Blanche unfastened the handkerchief she had tied over her head, and gave it to her brother; then, kneeling by the fountain, filled her small hand with the clear sparkling water. In silence, she had thrice expressed her wish; and the charm was on the point of completion, when a raven's hoarse scream was heard; and the ill-omened bird, still uttering its discordant note, flew from amidst the foliage of the oak.

With a faint expression of surprise and fear, Blanche regained her feet; the raven had passed immediately above her head, and so close to Edward, that he almost fancied he had felt the heavy flapping of its dusky wings.

"Give up this foolery," cried Godfrey, whose mind, like that of many sailors, was not entirely exempt from superstition. "Give up this foolery, I say. Tie up your head again, and come into breakfast."

"Indeed," Blanche answered, "there is, perhaps, too much of foolish superstition in all these ceremonies. I almost wish, I had not tried my fortune. My doing so was, surely, an absurdity, and I deserve to be disappointed."

"Try once again," said Edward. "You will have better luck another time."

"Oh, no, no; one act of folly in the day is assuredly enough; and there is the old gardener laughing at me."

He was not, however, laughing; on the contrary, he looked extremely grave; and he offered Blanche some flowers he had been holding in his hand, without addressing to her a single word.

"Thank you, Miles; thank you very much.
These are splendid carnations: I have nothing
to compare with them at Marshampton. You
must not forget the cuttings you promised
me."

"No, sure, Miss. I've had them all packed properly in moss; and I think they'll travel well enough. But it's late for cuttings; and I wouldn't answer for their rooting."

"I will plant them in a shady border, and water them with the greatest regularity."

The gardener shook his head, and glanced towards the spring; Blanche longed to hear what was passing in his mind; and had not Godfrey hurried her away, would still have lingered.

"I hope," said Edward, as they walked together towards the house, "that you are not fickle in your tastes and attachments; one of those individuals who love only when the sun is shining?"

"Why should you express such an aspiration?" inquired Blanche, not altogether pleased with the suspicion her cousin's words implied.

"Because of that which has recently occurred. You were on the point of invoking a blessing on an esteemed friend; a bird of evil augury flies by, and you instantly relinquish your intention. Does not this look like instability?"

"No; it was cowardice. I was silly enough to be frightened by that bird."

"Startled, rather."

"Well, startled. I lost my presence of mind; in short, proved myself an arrant coward. For that, you may blame me, if you choose; I willingly confess my want of courage: but do not, pray do not judge me fickle; or believe, that I can ever feel otherwise than grateful for all the notice and affection I have received from Mr. Vavasour."

"It is on us, upon my father, I should say, that the obligation has been conferred," was Edward's answer; and as he spoke, he lost the light tone of gaiety, which had marked his raillery of Blanche's cowardice.

" Are we likely to see your father this morning?" inquired Godfrey.

father's strongest peculiaritie Newstoke Priors, we seldom



CHAPTER III.

Mr. VAVASOUR did not appear. Edward's frewell was kind and courteous; and when he expressed a hope that they would again visit Newstoke, there was sincerity both in his tone and manner.

"Well," exclaimed Godfrey, rubbing his bands, "I'm glad we're off at last. The old man seemed so cut up yesterday, I was in a confounded fright that we shouldn't get away at all. And now, Blanche, I must tell you something that will, I fancy, entertain you. What do you think of his wanting you for a daughter-in-law? Fine thing to be mistress of Newstoke Priors, wouldn't it?"

[&]quot;Nonsense, Godfrey."

"To my mind now, that's a very uncivil mode of differing in opinion, or expressing incredulity. But, I declare I think that old fellow has turned your little head with all the fuss he made about you."

"I hope not, Godfrey; but really, your idea is so extraordinary, it is impossible to look upon it otherwise than as a joke. And, now, confess that it is one."

"No, Blanche; what I said was perfectly in earnest. Mr. Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, has set his heart on your marrying his son; and such being the case, I conclude you may be mistress of Newstoke Priors, if you choose so to be."

"Godfrey, I cannot believe it. That a man of Mr. Vavasour's fortune should wish his son, his only son, to connect himself with a pennyless girl, for, in truth, I am little better appears to me, it would to every one, nearly impossible."

"I cannot help it. You may believe the

fancy wild and unlikely; all the world may hold a similar opinion, and yet it may be true. Our cousin is a strange man, and therefore it is only natural he should wish for strange things; and, moreover, do all in his power to bring about his wishes. Don't you now understand why we were asked to Newstoke Priors; and why Edward was summoned home in that peremptory manner?"

"And why," Blanche mentally continued, with a deep sinking at the heart, "Mr. Vavasour told me yesterday that there was no use in my staying any longer." She then added, audibly. "How did you discover all this, Godfrey?"

"Oh, I don't know; I thought from the time of Edward's coming, there was some crotchet in the old gentleman's head. Besides, I have heard him praise you excessively to Edward."

"But that did not argue that he wished to make a match." "Possibly not; but his manner was very significant."

"But what did he, I mean Mr. Vavasour, say? Tell me, Godfrey. Tell me all about it, pray do."

"Why, you see," replied Godfrey, throwing himself back, "the fact was this. I was sitting on that bench close to the holly skreen—heard them coming, and as I couldn't guess what they were talking about, I didn't think it worth while to move away; and so, quite unintentionally, I overheard Mr. Vavasour—I don't remember his precise words, but he seemed to be expatiating greatly in your praise; talking of your beauty, amiability, and so forth."

"And wound up all, by expressing a wish such as you describe? Nay, Godfrey, I cannot yet believe that you heard correctly."

"As you will, Blanche. Believe me, or believe me not."

"The thing is so preposterous."

"I give you my honour it is true. Mr. Va-

vasour spoke of you in the highest terms; and if he didn't actually say, Edward, I wish to see you married to that girl, my firm belief is that he meant it. And I tell you, further, I do not consider the idea at all preposterous. You are a very pretty, engaging girl; as well born as Edward Vavasour himself; our relation has taken a violent fancy to you; moreover, he remembers that on one occasion you saved his life."

- "But I am portionless."
- "Newstoke Priors is worth fifteen thousand a year; and there is only one son."
 - "What did Edward say?"
- "I scarcely know. In fact, I heard but little of his answer. For, of course, when I discovered that their conversation could not possibly be intended for my ear, I took myself off."
- "And you did not hear how Edward received this intimation of his father's wishes? Oh Godfrey, tell me—do tell me. I am cer-

tain you did hear his answer. Tell me, or I shall fancy it was something very mortifying."

"Not in the least. I did not catch the whole of his rejoinder; but there was nothing mortifying in it."

"What was it then?"

"I believe he laughed, and said something about Lord Warleigh. And by the way, Blanche, who is this Lord Warleigh of whom you and Edward are always talking?"

"A great friend of Edward Vavasour's."

"Yes, I know that; but how came you to be so well acquainted with him?"

"He is intimate with the Brownlows, and often called in Hill Street."

"To look at you?"

" No, Godfrey."

"Of course you'll say, no. Girls always do. But tell me, Blanche, do you think this said Lord Warleigh, who knew the Brownlows, and passed so many of his mornings at their house, is really in love? Come now, be frank—make

me your confidant; you will find me safer than Harriet Brownlow; although, I do believe, she is the warmest hearted being in the world."

"Dearest Godfrey, I have no confidence to give. Lord Warleigh was in the habit of calling frequently in Hill Street; but whether he came for the sake of my charming society or not, I really cannot tell."

"You never gave yourself the trouble of ascertaining; I mean, you never once, in your own mind, inquired the motive of his visits?"

Blanche looked confused. She could not honestly deny that she had asked herself this question.

"So," mused Godfrey, "Edward was right; she's fond of Lord Warleigh. And he—what does he think of her? Was Edward also right, when he told me, I suspect not without intention, that Lord Warleigh is too poor a man, or thinks himself too poor a man, to marry without money?"

While Godfrey pondered over his sister's

partiality for the young nobleman, and the too probable chance that this predilection would issue in disappointment, his usually frank, good-natured countenance assumed so darkened an expression, that Blanche, full as she was of the reflections naturally called up by her brother's communication, was struck.

"My dearest Godfrey, what are you thinking of? Nothing pleasant, I am certain."

"Why, Blanche?"

"With such a cloudy brow as you have, just at present, it needs little penetration to guess that your thoughts are not of the most cheerful nature. You look—oh yes, you look exactly as dear old Mr. Vavasour does when in one of his silent moods. I never saw the slightest likeness between you before; but now, I could quite fancy you his son."

"You pay me a poor compliment."

" Nay, you know, that two people may resemble each other, and yet be very different."

"That sounds rather paradoxical."

"It does; but it is nevertheless quite true. Have you never been reminded of a handsome man by an ugly one?"

"Very probably. Still, your resembling me to Mr. Vavasour, when in one of what you call his silent moods, is, I assure you, far from being complimentary; inasmuch as at those seasons, Mr. Vavasour looks surprisingly like a felon brooding over his past crimes and misdemeanours."

"My dear Godfrey, what an extraordinary notion! Oh, I shall quarrel with you, indeed I shall. Our kind, generous old relation, who, full of consideration, has thought of little beyond our pleasure and enjoyment from the moment we entered his house, like a felon! What could have put that strange idea into your head?"

"The expression of Mr. Vavasour's countenance on those particular occasions," Godfrey observed, drily; and Blanche shuddered and turned pale; for, just then, his last words to her rushed into her mind. Godfrey perceived his sister's discomposure, and altered his tone to one of gaiety.—

"Blanche, what a little fool you are; I'm not in earnest, of course I'm not! Now, don't let that remantic imagination of yours run away with the idea that our respectable cousin, and the head of our most ancient house, deserves to be hanged."

- " No, Godfrey. But -"
- " Well, but what?"
- # Mr. Vavasour does look very odd at times; and does and says extraordinary things."
- "Yes; Mr. Vavasour is a character; his head's a little touched."
- "He certainly is eccentric. Godfrey, what a pity it is."

"A very great pity. Eccentricity of character must be always subject of regret. Under no circumstances can such peculiarity be desirable; and it is only to be excused when it takes, as indeed it often does, the form of excessive philanthropy."

" Mr. Vavasour is very generous."

- "Exceedingly. Only yesterday he told me, that if I ever should want money, I may apply to him; and then offered me any horse in his stable."
 - "Dear old man! Did you accept the offer, Godfrey? I mean about the horse," Blanche saked, rather in trepidation; she well knew how little welcome such an addition to the family establishment would be considered by her father.
 - "Accept a horse? No, to be sure not. What should I do with a horse? And, by the way, Blanche, talking of generosity, my father seems to be grown twenty times worse than ever. I used to hope, that when you grew up you would gain an influence over him; but from what I gather, he's more stingy than even formerly."
 - "Papa's income is very limited."
 - "Yes; but he needn't cut so very close. As far as money goes, he might, with profit, take a leason from Mr. Vavasour."

"If papa had only one tenth of Mr. Vavasour's fortune, oh, Godfrey, how happy we might all be! But, even then, I suppose, you would choose to be a sailor?"

"Yes, Blanche. I like my profession well enough to abide by it."

"Do you think Mr. Vavasour will leave papa any thing when he dies? My aunt Letitia expects it."

"She will probably find herself mistaken; for when a man has children of his own, it is not likely he will leave his money to a relation, whom he has scarcely ever seen, and about whom, he does not care one farthing. Mr. Vavasour may leave you something; a few hundred pounds, perhaps; but, as for any thing further—bah!—there is not the least chance of it."

"But he has only one son; and I don't fancy he's very partial to him."

"Nor I, to say the truth. I often wondered at his indifference; for Edward Vavasour is

a fine, open-hearted, gentlemanlike fellow, in spite of all his pride and coxcombry. Yes, Blanche, in spite of the good opinion he entertains of himself."

"I did not observe any excess of self-complacency in Edward Vavasour."

"What do you think of his tirade against women? His pathetic description of the persecution he endures? Which I have not the slightest doubt he enjoys beyond all things."

"Indeed, Godfrey, I think Edward was sincere in all he said yesterday evening; and if you had seen him, as I did, at Lady Alicia Raby's, courted, flattered, fawned upon, you would not be astonished that he is aware of the high esteem in which he is regarded. How can he help knowing it?"

"Still, Blanche, I adhere to my opinion, that Edward Vavasour is pleased, not as he pretends, disgusted, by all this court and flattery; and, moreover, I would bet any thing, that if he ever marries, it will be some woman who has all but popped the question."

"I can't think it, Godfrey; I can't indeed."

"I don't like the way in which he expressed himself at all, last night. I never like to hear a man run women down. When a man does—depend upon it, he has either been accustomed to associate with the worst portion of your sex; or, he is a puppy, full of self-sufficiency, overrating ours. And then, to go and class himself with Lord Warleigh!"

"Dear Godfrey, some people would consider that rather a token of modesty."

" Pooh !"

"Remember Mr. Vavasour's talents; the great estimation in which he is held by the political world. Besides, his family is quite as old as Lord Warleigh's—and as for fortune—I don't believe there can be any material difference. Lord Warleigh told me himself that he is a poor man."

" He did, did he ?"

" More than once."

"Then," thought Godfrey, "I wouldn't

give a brass farthing for your chance of being Lady Warleigh. My poor Blanche!"

"You still think Lord Warleigh the better man?" inquired Blanche.

"Decidedly; as far as general estimation goes. Take my word for it, that title, which Edward Vavasour affects to hold so cheap, will weigh more with society in general, with women in particular, than all Edward Vavasour's talents and influence, and even older family—for, I believe, we have the best of it there—for all the common purposes of life, a peer is worth fifty per cent more than a commoner, even though his title be comparatively recent.

CHAPTER IV.

"How cut up poor old Mr. Vavasour is," said Mrs. Vyse, the Newstoke housekeeper, to her colleague, Crawley. "I don't believe I ever saw him so down-hearted since I've been living here. I declare, when I went this morning to receive my orders about dinner, he didn't seem to have a good word to throw to a dog."

"Aye, and Mr. Edward's not much better; scarcely opened his lips all the time of dinner."

"And no wonder," said the old gardener, who had just brought in a basket of early peaches; and who, in consequence of his being uncle to Mrs. Vyse, considered himself at full liberty to take a share in the conversa-

tion; "no wonder Mr. Edward's cast down, after such a warning as he had this morning."

"Warning? What warning, in the name of wonder?"

"Why, you see, I had picked a nosegay for Miss Vavasour, some of those carnations she used to be so fond of; and when I saw them go along the terrace, and down towards the Wishing Well, I followed after them."

"They have been at the Well, have they?"

"Yes; they went there for her to try her luck; I went too: and while I was a waiting to give the flowers, I saw every thing as happened; and I didn't like it at all, niece Dinah, I can tell you."

"Why, what did happen?"

"Why, you see, they came together, Miss Blanche and Mr. Godfrey, and our Mr. Edward; and down she knelt and wished; I don't know exactly what, of course; because, if so be's the wish is heard, the spell's broken. It's no hard matter to guess, though; for what

does all young women wish for? And it was something about Mr. Edward, I'll be bound, or he wouldn't have been so pettiklar about her doing every thing quite right. Well, as I was a saying, Miss Vavasour, she kneels down and wishes, and just as she was going to drink the water, whirr-r goes a raven and puts an end to every thing. Now, if Mr. Edward doesn't take warning by that bird, and have nothing more to do with Miss Vavasour, 'twill be a bad job for him, I reckon.'

"Uncle, you're too credulous by half. For my part, I don't believe in charms, nor in omens either."

"Then, Dinah, you are wrong; and I wonder to hear you say so. There's good luck and bad luck about birds. The raven's always reckoned unlucky, specially to the Vavasours: there never was a turn of evil fortune came to them, never a death, nor a loss of no kind in the family but a raven was sure to prognosticate of it. So, as I was a saying, Mr. Edward had better not forget the warning he's a had this blessed morning."

"How do you know, Miles," asked the butler, "the warning was meant for him? Isn't it just as likely that the raven boded ill to Miss Vavasour? You know, she's one of the family, as much as he is."

"There's no denying that, Mr. Crawley. There's no denying what you say; Miss Vavasour is a Vavasour, and the sign may have been meant for her instead of him."

"Aye," observed the housekeeper, " and if there should be anything of a courtship going on, and I wouldn't say that there is not, why nobody will gainsay that she's more likely to come to trouble by it than Mr. Edward is."

"Pretty young creature, I should be very sorry if harm came to her. She's a nice young lady; such a pleasant way of speaking. And many's the time she's stood talking to me about my flowers, and the old place, and all that. I 3

LIMIT BUT SHE & SHITTY EDDINGS TO LEAVE NEW-

- * And well she may be." retorted Mrs.

 The * Masser made is much fuss and piece
 if with about her is if she had been his own
 form manufact."
- "But I sage Mr. Elivard will manage to steep near of here for all site is so pretty and panner." Said Miles, returning to his original near. "For that hard district fly for nothing; mark our vicus, and see, if evil doesn't happen one hay to other to young Mr. Vavascur."
- the but with a minimal the butler, smiling at the but man's receiving. — Why shouldn't the requestant some in fire his share? How can you tell that the omen wasn't sent for him!"
- "Western may really. I opine that as the bird was born and brede as one may say, at Newstoke, this most hardy that he came to warn his own master. Mr. Edward. Indeed, I think it stands to reason that he did."

"May be," rejoined Crawley, jeeringly, "the raven came to warn them all."

"It's not unlikely. They be all Vavasours, you know."

"Yes," observed Mrs. Vyse. "And if Mr. Edward should play his cousin false, I warrant had have to pay for it. Mr. Godfrey's not the young gentleman to let his sister be un-indoomely used, and take no notice of it. And were enough, if Miss Vavasour should break her heart, and the young gentlemen fall to loggerheads, and blow each other's brains out, that hird won't have gone flying about for nothing."

"Well, Dinah, you may laugh, and so may Mr. Crawley: but I don't consider it no laughing matter. Besides, it isn't a month since mother of them arches under the old church gave way; and I suppose you won't gainsay, that that's a serious sort of thing, after all the good monk engraved upon a stone hard bye." Then gently rocking his body, Miles repeated:

÷

- Viet mass series al ses grass;
 men a eri stad se inne;
 me me gras se inst sui seni sen.
- That if a suppose the old fellow meant to the paid. Balais not red, it's yellow," in name: Impair
- Thur's what many has said. And so some minist mere will be number. Old Ralph Uncertwood, he was gunekeeper when first I came to fire in Newsockia, used to say, that very like mere a measure habben somewhere in that which. The know people do say that them old mones was often obligated to hide away their nodes to open places, such as that?"
- TWELL of that should be the case, if there's treasure to be found, let all the arches tumble forms say 1, the faster the better."
- The wouldn't he you no good, if they did, Mr Crawler. The money wouldn't be yours not more to then."
- " It would be my master's I suppose; and the richer the master, the better his service."

"Aye, but the question is, would the money belong to Mr. Vavasour? Ralph used to say, he didn't think it would; and that, mayhap, master would get into trouble that way; which might be what the old monk meant. But I've heard other people say, they thought it wasn't unlikely, that as the workmen were a digging to find the treasure, they'd bring the old church down about their heads, and be crushed to death: and that was why the gold was called red."

"'Tisn't a bad reason neither," observed Mrs. Vyse.

"Any way, 'tis' very clear there's mischief close at hand."

"But, uncle, according to those verses, every one of the arches must fall down."

"And so they will, Dinah, before any of us are many months older. Old Willie, smuggling Willie, told me that there's only two of them standing, and they're a crumbling away as fast as possible. So I shouldn't wonder if the next spring tide was to wash them clean aw 'specially after what happened with that the bird this morning. You don't believe in a things, nor Mr. Crawley either; but the doesn't prevent their being true. So remen what I say: there'll be mischief happen in family before the twelvemonth's over. In good evening."



CHAPTER V.

The traveller's reception at Marshampton was scarcely of the benign description. While Mr. Vavasour thought of the necessary increase to weekly bills, aunt Letitia was greatly disappointed that none of the happy results she had calculated on had come to pass. Blanche could not hold out the faintest ray of hope, that the reversion of the family livings was secured to her father. Nothing had been promised by either of the Mr. Vavasours respecting Godfrey's promotion; and, as for Miss Bransby's pet scheme that Blanche would captivate the younger gentleman, Godfrey assured her there was not even a probability of its realization; and this, in language

so decided that Blanche, who happened to be present, although she laughed and treated the subject with apparent indifference, felt a strange tightness at her heart; she thought, from disappointed pride.

Mr. Vavasour's parting cadeau to his young favourite, served, however, in some degree to dispel aunt Letitia's discomposure. In her eyes the trinkets were extremely splendid, and must, she imagined, be of considerable value. There was a certain ruby heart amongst them, which she was sure must have cost at the very least ten guineas. She had one like it, only the stones were not so large; and the price of that, she knew, had been eight pounds ten shillings. Then, these ornaments had been his wife's, and his giving them to Blanche, was undoubtedly suspicious. They were not, certainly, the family jewels. Those, as heirlooms, would, of course, be given only to his son's wife. Still these pearls, and rubies, and diamonds, had belonged to a Mrs. Vavasour; and Miss Bransby wouldn't say, she never did say exactly what she thought—but, she did think old Mr. Vavasour's presenting Blanche with them, was very odd, and must mean something.

In vain Blanche protested. Miss Bransby had her own opinion, and adhered to it. Such was usually her wont; and she soon forgot her other sources of disappointment in the delight of running from house to house, informing her acquaintance of the charming visit Blanche and Godfrey had been paying at Newstoke Priors, and of the splendid and mysterious gift the former had brought home with her.

Never, perhaps, had Miss Bransby's regret for old Mrs. Daventry's demise been half so poignant as at present.

In turning over the trinkets, every one of which was most minutely inspected, the good lady discovered a treasure—to wit, a slip of paper forming evidently a fragment of a letter; and without the slightest hesitation she read aloud as follows:—

"These ornaments you gave me in the days of our happiness. After our estrangement I did not return them; to do so appeared like adding insult to treachery. But now, now on my death-bed——"

Here the paper had been torn across.

"Well," cried Miss Bransby, "this really is provoking; not to be able to see the end. What could it be? But," she added after a pause, laying her fore-finger upon her nose, "I think I can guess—yes, yes, I fancy I understand the whole. Depend upon it, Mr. Vavasour—and this accounts for a great deal about his marriage, which we none of us were able to make out—yes, yes, that's what it was! I've not a doubt upon the subject. And see, here's the name or part of it on this side; 'Frederica Vava——' the rest's torn off. Aye, aye, I see it all as plain as possible."

"All what?" asked Godfrey, rather petulantly.

"Why, Mr. Vavasour's marriage. It was a sort of clandestine business. He had been

living abroad, and nobody had an idea that he was married, when all of a sudden he nearly astonished us all out of our minds, by making his appearance as a widower and the father of a son; very provoking it was. I remember quite well that your father and I—no, not I, I never reckoned much on Frederick Vavasour's being the better for that property; and it seems I was quite right; but he did, and so did your poor mother, and of course it was a dreadful disappointment when Mr. Lionel Vavasour came home, bringing this boy with him; especially, as nobody had ever even suspected that he was married."

- "And why, do you imagine, did he conceal his marriage?"
- "Why, Blanche? Why, because, I've no doubt in the world, that he married some low woman who played him false."
- "Don't you think, Blanche," said Godfrey almost in a whisper, "that perhaps he stabbed or had her poisoned in a fit of jealousy?"

"Is it not more likely that he killed his rival in a duel?"

"Eh, what?" asked Miss Bransby, "killed his rival? Well, that's not at all unlikely. Duels often end fatally; particularly on the continent, where, I'm told, they generally fight with swords, or fire across a pocket-hand-kerchief; when, you know, Blanche, it stands to reason some one must be killed."

"What shall I do about this slip of paper which must have been left here unintentionally? Shall I enclose it to Mr. Vavasour?" asked Blanche.

"No," replied her brother. For where a question arises between to do, or not to do, men usually advise the last, and in nine cases out of ten they counsel wisely.

"Send back that slip of paper? By no means. In all probability, Mr. Vavasour would scarcely be pleased to know it had fallen into other hands than his own; and there is no wisdom in telling people what

they would rather not know. Nobody thanks another for bringing evil tidings, or likes him better for it. Good news, indeed, is quite another thing; by all means, be the bearer of pleasant information, if you can."

This was Miss Bransby's speech.

"Then, at least," Blanche answered, "we ought carefully to avoid mentioning the circumstance."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Bransby. "It's a family secret; all families have their secrets, great families, especially. Ah, Mrs. Stevens, to you're come to look at Blanche's jewels, tery beautiful they are. Stay, I will shew you."

While thus employed, Miss Bransby let the paper fall. It lay unperceived on the ground, for other friends dropped in; and Blanche's whole attention was engrossed until she was fairly wearied.

"Godfrey, I am so tired," she said, when all were gone at last; "I hope no one else will want to see those ornaments. If they do, I must make the charge over to my aunt Letitia; constitute her a sort of mistress of the robes."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Vavasour, picking up the paper.

Blanche explained as briefly as possible. Her father read the paper, but in silence; Blanche replaced it in the jewel case, and hurried that away. She heard the gate open, and she fancied she saw another parasol approaching.

"What bores these country neighbours are," cried Godfrey. "I don't think anything in the world should tempt me to settle down in a small town like Marshampton."

"A fine place such as Newstoke Priors is certainly to be preferred. Papa, you want something?"

"No, nothing," answered Mr. Vavasour; while violently pulling the bellstring; "at least, I only want to know who it was came in just now. Mary, who was that woman I saw go by the window?"

" Woman, Sir ?"

"Yes; woman. You know, I don't allow followers."

"Nobody's come in that I know of."

"Well, go and see. I'm certain I saw somebody come in, and go round towards the litchen."

Mary retreated, followed close by Mr. Vava-

"I told you so," he said, returning shortly after from the passage, where he had been listening. "I knew some one had been let in; just at our dinner hour, too; so convenient; although when I hired that wench, only a week ago, I made her distinctly understand that no followers of any sort are allowed here. Upon my life, it's too bad. Who is it, Mary?" he shouted; "Who is it? I insist upon knowing."

[&]quot;My mother, Sir."

[&]quot;Your mother, indeed! And what business has your mother in my kitchen, I should like to know?"

"Indeed, Sir, 1'm very sorry, but mother was going by, and she didn't know there was any harm in just dropping in to see me for five minutes."

"Dropping in to see you! She came for more than that, I warrant. She came to get her dinner here. But this won't answer, it won't answer at all. I never have allowed my servants to see company, and what's more, I never will. So now, you understand, Mary."

"If I don't give you satisfaction, Sir, I'm quite ready to quit; there are plenty of places to be had," cried Mary, flouncing out of the room.

Again Blanche thought of Newstoke Priors, and how much pleasanter a residence that was, where everything appeared to go by clockwork, and where the servants really seemed attached to their employer. She little guessed the difference between a large and a restricted income; nor how infinitely more easily the man of wealth may win the attachment of his dependents, than may his poorer neighbour.

"Sir," cried Mary's colleague, (a damsel with red hair, and gilt earrings, and blue ribbons in her cap,) as she flung back the door with more violence than respect. "Please, Sir, Hannah Hodge has called with the chickens; but she says, she can't on no account whatever, let you have them for three shillings the couple. She says, chickens sold in Darford Market last Saturday, for three and sixpence, and four shillings a couple, and that she can't possibly let you have these for less."

"Three shillings and sixpence and four shillings for a couple of fowls! I never heard of anything so preposterous. Tell Hannah Hodge I shan't give her a farthing more for these than I gave for those I bought last week from the man who called here with poultry; and by the way, I wonder that he has never been here again,"

"His chickens wasn't worth the money; little bits of things no bigger than pigeons."

[&]quot;Are Hannah Hodge's fowls full sized?"

"Yes, Sir; they are as fine fowls as any I ever see."

"Well, tell her I'll give three shillings, but no more. That is to say, if they're really worth it."

"I know Hannah won't take less than three and sixpence."

"Go and see—or stay—where is Hannah,
I'll speak to her myself. Where is she?"

"At the back door."

"At the back door? At the back door, did you say? And, pray, what business has she " Please, Sir, shall I tell Hannah you won't give more than three shillings?"

"Tell Hannah, she may take her fowls to York, and herself, too."

"Thankye, Sir," said the woman, dropping a curtsey; and hurrying off as if in bodily fear of her employer's indignation.

"Stay," shouted Mr. Vavasour; "tell that woman that she may bring her poultry round to the front door, and if I find the fowls worth buying, I'll give her what I said, but not one farthing more."

Sarah did as she was ordered; and after an alternation of nearly twenty minutes, a bargain was concluded. Two of the leanest fowls were transferred from Hannah Hodges' basket, in Mr. Vavasour's kitchen, and three shillings and threepence from his pocket to her's. Hannah then took her leave, insisting that she had parted with her poultry at a loss; while Mr. Vavasour, after himself seeing the fowls deposited in their appointed place, returned to

the sitting-room, affirming that Miss Hodge had succeeded in overreaching him. Yet in their hearts, both Hannah Hodge and Mr-Vavasour were perfectly satisfied with the transaction. She, because she had disposed of two very indifferent fowls at a comparatively high price; he, because he had purchased the said fowls for threepence less than he believed any other person would have given for them.

"Papa, you must let me try my fortune the next time you want to make a bargain," said Blanche, weary of hearing Hannah Hodge abused.

"You, indeed! A pretty bargain you would make. Why, Blanche, I don't believe you know any thing more about house-keeping than a child of six years old. Well then, can you tell me what Mrs. Brownlow gave for her poultry; the couple, of course? You can't.—Then, what's the price of fish in London? How much are soles the pair;—and turbots—what can you get a turbot for in town?"

"Papa, I'm afraid I must plead ignorance."

"Ah, so I thought, Girls never know the Price of anything. The only sort of knowledge which can ever be really useful to a woman, is that which is entirely forgotten in her education."

CHAPTER VI.

THE remainder of that summer, and the ensuing autumn passed happily to Blanche. Godfrey was at home and devoted to his sister—more devoted than even formerly; for he sometimes thought Blanche less gay, and animated than became her years; and believing that Lord Warleigh had acquired some hold over her affections, he was unwearied in his endeavours to engross her time and thoughts to the young nobleman's exclusion.

How beautiful the link which binds the young members of a family together! On the one side, confidence—on the other, guardianship without authority: on neither, selfishness. It is, perhaps, the only species of affection entirely peculiar to the human race. Parental love is a law as strong, and almost more niversal with the brute creation than with us; and animals are capable of, nay they are prone to, contracting friendships: but fraternal affection seems unknown to them. The nearest approach to it is, possibly, the herding together of young broods of birds; yet that again is in all probability, an instinct bearing a closer relation to their common resting place, the nest or the mother's wing, than to mutual lependence or attachment.

And if fraternal love be indeed man's disletive prerogative, it is, also, one of his
letest, his most enduring, and his holiest
of ons. The lover to his mistress swears
relating love—and at the time, his oath is
solly sincere—aye—swears, protests, and
loo often breaks the solemn protestation:
woman smiles upon her wooer; and by
bye accords the same soft token of attachto another; so those, who have been all
gs to each other, grow cold and foreign—
ost learn to hate each other. And friendpsprings often rather from congeniality of

tastes, or identity of occupation, than findividual preference: and let these alter, there no longer be the same pursuit, the opinion, and strait the loving friends lose their former interest in each other. But it not so with brotherly affection; such love Godfrey cherished towards Blanche and for him: that is a strong and an unchang feeling; one which, dating from the cradle, pires but in the grave; a spring, a notable failing spring, of pure and wholesome was which, though their channel may at the diverge, their brightness sully, or their curr slacken, still fail not utterly, nor alter in the nature.

There shall be love in heaven; will it not such love as this?

Of Newstoke Priors, Godfrey and his si seldom spoke. To Godfrey, their séjour that place had been rather an exercise of a denial than enjoyment; while Blanche ex not recur to it without remembering possible object of Mr. Vavasour's invitati and considering the failure of the old gentleman's manœuvre, together with the cause, it is scarce marvellous that her impressions of Edward Vavasour were of varying description. Sometimes, she could not deny that he was an extremely captivating individual; at others, he was, as she at first believed him, very conceited and coxcomical.

Towards the middle of October, both Blanche and Godfrey, indeed all Marshampton, learnt with considerable satisfaction that Mrs. Brown-ow and her daughter were expected immedially at Westbourne Park.

" How delightful !" cried Blanche.

G dfrey looked more gratified than his sister,

es," observed Miss Bransby, "it is good es. Of course, Blanche, you'll be a great at Westbourne; and—and—however, we not build castles: only, as assuredly they ill see a vast deal of company, I shouldn't der if you—Pray, my dear Blanche, did

none of the gentlemen you used to meet it Hill Street seem to take a fancy to you?"

" None."

"Did you say nobody fell in love with you Well, that's odd—your mother had plenty of admirers, might have married very well indeed only she chose to take your father—and a most unfortunate choice it was. I warned her; I told her over and over again what the consequence would be, if she married a poor man; but she wouldn't listen to me; and a miserable piece of business it turned out."

"Well, aunt Letitia, I will not marry imprudently; I will be wiser than my poor mama; and when I do receive an offer take your advice about accepting it."

"Very good. But then you're not so handsome as your mother, nor any thing like it; and so I shouldn't be surprised if you never do have any offers. However, it's a good thing, they, the Brownlows are coming to Westbourne, I wonder whether their establishment's complete? Do you think they are likely to want a housemaid? There was a young woman came to offer for my place the other day. She was too much of a servant for me; but she might isnit Mrs. Brownlow. Do you suppose they want a housemaid? I should think they must; for of course, they can't bring all their establishment from Hill Street. I wish you would write to Miss Brownlow and inquire?"

"Would not the house-keeper be the best channel of inquiry?"

"Perhaps she might: but those housebeepers are such an insolent race, I don't wish to have any thing to do with her. And yet I should like to help this young woman to a situation, for I took a fancy to her. But I'll tell you what, Godfrey, you can walk over to Westbourne, it's not above two miles and a half, and see Mrs. whatever her name is and tell her about Jemima Skull."

"Thank you;" said Godfrey, drily; and taking up his hat, he walked out of the house.

"How selfish and unaccommodating Godfrey is; never will do any thing to oblige any body; the very ditto of his father. Have you heard the news?" continued Miss Bransby addressing Mr. Vavasour, who just the entered.

" What news?"

"That the Brownlows are expected, immediately, at Westbourne. We shall hav all sorts of gay doings, I'll be bound."

"Yes, and the price of everything doubled."

"Nonsense, Mr. Vavasour; one family coming into the neighbourhood can't raise the markets."

"They'll turn the heads of all the servan maids, if they do nothing else."

"Pshaw, Mr. Vavasour! You always set the worst of everything."

"Blanche, will you walk?" cried Godfre from the garden.

Blanche joyfully assented; and while the two elders pursued their wrangling discussion the brother and sister descanted on the man sources of enjoyment Harriet Brownlow's coming to Westbourne would probably throw open.

The Brownlows came; but whatever pleasure Godfrey might derive from Harriet's residence at Westbourne, it rather took from Blanche's happiness than added to it. She saw so much less of her brother now than formerly. He was perpetually walking over to Westbourne; and even when at home, he was distrait, dissatisfied, sometimes irritable. Blanche and Harriet met but seldom. It is true, a very fashionable carriage was seen standing for nearly an hour before the gate of Larrel Cottage, only two days subsequent to the Brownlows' arrival; and even aunt Letitia, who was present during the greater part of the visit, was compelled to admit that nothing could exceed Miss Brownlow's cordiality and open-heartedness, nor the apparent kindness with which Mrs. Brownlow seconded her daughter's wish that Blanche should come over to Westbourne constantly; or rather, stay some time there.

Blanche, of course, readily assented. But, as she could not walk five miles as easily as Godfrey could, morning visiting was impossible on her side; and no specific day having been affixed to the longer invitation, it ran a fair chance of being that which general invitations often are, no invitations at all: and, in addition to losing her agreeable companion, Blanche underwent the pleasure of hearing her friend accused of insincerity, while she felt perfectly assured that the seeming neglect on Harriet's part proceeded from thoughtlessness alone.

"Nonsense," said Miss Bransby, in reply to Blanche's justification of Harriet Brownlow"You're talking nonsense, Blanche. Harriet Brownlow must know well enough that you can't be walking over the country like a farmer adaughter; and that if she wishes for your company, she ought to send the carriage. She must know it. The fact is, they've got the

house full of company, and they don't want you. Ah—there they go. I don't admire that girl at all. What a strange hat she's got on. Is it the fashion? And what's the carriage stopping for, I wonder—not coming here, I hope. Bless me, if they should be coming here, and I'm such a figure, and the room's so untidy; Arthur does make such a mess with that carving. Ah, no: I believe they're going on. Well, that's a good thing, at any rate," and aunt Letitia, looking not a little disappointed, retreated from the window, where she had stationed herself, and putting on her tortoiseshell spectacles, resumed her usual employment of worsted work.

News, news!" cried Godfrey, entering the parlour with more animation of manner than usual when paying what he called duty visto Miss Bransby.

Blanche turned pale. Her brother held an Pen letter in his hand, and she feared that the tidings which thus excited him would induce a separation.

"Dear me, Godfrey," said Miss Bransby,
what is the matter? Pray be less boisterous.
You forget that you are not on board the Jupiter. What in the name of wonder has happened?"

"My promotion—that's all," he answered, coolly.

"Your promotion, dearest Godfrey?"

"Yes; I am appointed first lieutenant on board the Spartan. Wish me joy, Blanche."

"Well, that is good news," said aunt Letitia, throwing her venerable arms round the young sailor's neck. "So you're a first lieutenant? Humph! that is getting on well. How did it happen?"

" Interest."

" Whose ?"

"Edward Vavasour's, I fancy, though he doesn't say."

" Have you heard from Edward Vavasour?"
Blanche inquired, but not very audibly.

"Yes; I have a letter from him: and what do you think, Blanche? He's coming here."

"Coming here!" said both the ladies; the one in a tone of surprise, the other rather of regret.

"Yes; there's his letter. Read it, Blanche."
Blanche read a few lines, in which, after informing Godfrey of his promotion, Edward Vavasour proceeded to state his intention of trespassing on the hospitality of his friends at Marshampton. An engagement to Lord Warleigh would, he averred, take him within thirty miles of that place; and having heard that the neighbouring moors furnished excellent shooting, he purposed spending a few days or a fortnight at Laurel Cottage; provided, of course, he could be received without inconvenience."

Miss Bransby looked exceedingly sapient on learning this scheme of Mr. Edward Vavasour's; and, as her mental speculations (she did not say exactly what was passing in her mind) became more vivid and confirmed, she glanced knowingly at Godfrey, complacently towards Blanche; and even suffered her elation of spirits to surprise her into bestowing on the latter an embrace, the counterpart of that with which she had congratulated Godfrey on the step he had acquired.

A proud woman was aunt Letitia that morning. She knew her nephew to be rising fast in his profession; she believed, nay, she was confident, that before long, her niece would be wedded to the heir of Newstoke Priors; and all this surprisingly good fortune had fallen upon her relatives in consequence of her foresight and generosity. It was she who had brought Mr. Vavasour to reason respecting his daughter's acceptance of Harriet Brownlow's invitation. It was she who had furnished the greater portion of the necessary funds for the expedition which led to that meeting between old Mr. Vavasour and Blanche. Who, then,

could deny, that she, Letitia Bransby, had been the artificer, the origin, and cause of Godfrey's promotion — of Blanche's brilliant marriage."

"Godfrey," inquired Blanche, with some anxiety, "do tell me, does papa know that Edward is coming?"

"Yes; he has seen the letter."

" And what does he say?"

Godfrey turned his back upon his sister, without answering.

"Nay, Godfrey, do tell me; how does papa take it? Is he pleased?"

"No, to be sure not. How could you suppose he would be pleased?"

" But is he very much annoyed?"

"Annoyed, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Bransby, shaking off her pleasant dream. "Annoyed? What is there to annoy your father? I'm sure he ought to be full of happiness, and gratitude to me; and so, Blanche and Godfrey, so should you. For if it hadn't been

for me, and the trouble I took about your going to town, Blanche, last May, nothing of all this would have happened. You remember what a scene I had with your father that morning. I'm sure I shall never forget it. He was so violent and rude! Yes, Godfrey, violent and rude. I never met with such behaviour from a gentleman before. Very nearly knocked me down. If I hadn't gone out of the room just when I did, I do believe he would. He put himself in such a tantarum. Even as it was, he dragged my ——" here Miss Bransby checked herself, for she saw that her nephew seemed more inclined to laugh than sympathise.

"Well," said Godfrey, "what was dragged? Did you fairly come to fistycuffs?"

Miss Bransby drew herself up.

"Godfrey, I am a lady by birth and education, although I do not boast of Norman blood; and I have never before been even suspected of doing anything unladylike."

"But, I thought you and my father had

a fight—so at least you seemed to say, just now."

"No; I never forget myself—Mr. Vavasour did; in fact, he put himself in such a passion, that I was glad to get away from him. And it was well I did; for on reaching your sister's room, I found—" And in a voice choking with agitation, Miss Bransby related the history of the insult Mr. Vavasour had put upon her.

Godfrey stuffed his pocket handkerchief into his mouth.

"Yes, Mr. Godfrey Vavasour, you may hugh—make a joke about it if you please; but I can tell you, that if that scene, disgraceful as it was, had not taken place, you would not have been first Lieutenant of His Majesty's ship Spartan; nor Mr. Edward Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, talking of coming to Laurel Cottage,"

"But what," asked Godfrey, hastily reco-

vering his gravity, "what was the row about! How came you and my father to quarrel?"

"What are all your father's rows about?"

Money to be sure."

"Ah," exclaimed Godfrey, sharply, "that confounded money!"

"I suppose," said Blanche, "Papa is mannoyed at the probable expence of Mr. Varansour's visit."

"Annoyed! He's half mad about it—
Swears he won't spend a sixpence more or that account; for he never invited Edward, and what's more, he never intended to invite him. He hates them both—father and son."

"Why, dearest Godfrey?"

"Hang me, if I can tell; unless it be, the he hates the old man because he considered himself entitled to take a wife and have heir, instead of leaving the family property us; and Edward, because he is likely one determined to inherit the said property. However, be here

motive for disliking Edward what it may, my father is uncommonly put out by the prospect of his coming."

"But, surely, papa will receive Mr. Vavasour kindly?"

"Oh, yes; he'll be civil to him, I suppose. You know, my father is a gentleman, and exping on that memorable occasion, recorded by our aunt Letitia, conducts himself as such. He'll give Edward a civil welcome, as far as words go—but for anything farther—by Jove, I don't believe he'll fork out a single farthing beyond the usual sum; and that's small enough, in all conscience."

"And there are so many things which will be absolutely necessary," Blanche observed; "Wine—"

- "I shall take care of the wine."
- "Dear Godfrey, but that is very hard on you."
 - "Your father must be brought to reason.

There may be a great deal depending on young man's visit; he should, therefore, received with the utmost cordiality; and tended, as far as circumstances will permit, whospitality. Your father must be brought reason, I repeat," said Miss Bransby.

"I wish with all my heart he could: but unfortunately, where money is concerned, my father is not easily persuaded."

"Did you remind him of the livings old Mr. Vavasour has in his gift?"

"Yes, my dear aunt, I did indeed. I reminded him of them; and I might just as well have held my tongue."

"And of young Vavasour's interest with government. Why goodness me, your father must be mad! Here is a golden opportunity thrown in his way, and he loses it for the sake myself. Wait here, Blanche, and if Mrs. Langly should call—she's coming by appointment—just tell her I was obliged to go out, but shall be back again immediately. Where is your father, Godfrey?"

"At home. At least, I left him there."

"Well, I shall try my eloquence; and I am rery much mistaken if I don't make him more reasonable."

"You had better not," cried Godfrey, as
Miss Bransby shut the door. "You'll only
get your cap and wig knocked off again.
Blanche, what a glorious scene that must have
been!"

"Godfrey, you should go with my aunt, you should indeed."

"Not I. I've had enough of domesticities for one day. Besides, I should only mar the matter. Better let her manage it alone. I dare say she'll make something of it."

"Godfrey, what shall we do with Edward Vavasour?"

"Try and save him from starvation, I spose; for that seems likely enough to be fate."

"I mean in the way of amusement."

"Oh, he'll amuse himself well enough."

There are the moors, you know; and..."

"Westbourne."

"True; I suppose he will be a great deal at Westbourne."

"Perhaps, Godfrey, Edward Vavasour will lose his heart to Harriet."

"Not very likely. Or, at any rate, there's not much chance of Harriet Brownlow's liking him. Too much of a puppy to please her, I take it. And, by the way, talking of Harriet reminds me that I have a note for you from her. I met the carriage close by the gate here, when she gave it me; but this visit of



"Quite well. At least, she is looking beautiful."

Harriet's note ran thus-

"My dear Blanche,

"Can you come to us on Monday, and stay the remainder of the week? We have just got rid of some people who would have bored you as they have done me; and we are expecting this afternoon to be joined by one or two visiters, who will, I think, be more according to your taste. But we shall not be gay; therefore, no thoughts pour la toilette—that plague and pleasure of a woman's life.

"With love,

"Yours affectionately,

"HARRIET BROWNLOW."

" Westbourne Park, Saturday."

"Well," asked Godfrey, "what does Harriet say?"

Blanche shewed him the note.

"Very unlucky," he remarked, "that that invitation should have come just now."

"You think I can't accept it."

"How can you, when we are expecting Edward Vavasour?"

"He is not coming to see me," Blanche arswered archly. "The moors are his attraction—Besides, he mentions no particular time for his arrival. In all probability, therefore, I shall have returned from Westbourne, before he makes his appearance at Marshampton. Moreover, I cannot help fancying that perhaps he will not come at all."

"To say the truth, Blanche, I have a glimmering of hope that he will not. It does not appear to me that there can be any particula object in his coming to our dull village; while a hundred things may happen to prevent it. At any rate, it would be a pity you should disappoint Miss Brownlow, and give up a certain pleasure for an uncertain—"

[&]quot;Annoyance."

- "Edward's visit should hardly be ranked as an annoyance."
 - "Inconvenience, then."
 - "That it certainly must prove. To have him, with all his airs and his finery, stuck down at Laurel Cottage, half-starved and ill-accommodated—for such, most assuredly, will be the case, is, I grant you, not a very pleasant prospect; but we must make the best of it. Here is our worthy aunt come back. I wonder what she's done with my father? Not much, I fear; she has returned too soon. Perhaps, the poor old soul has even had her cap knocked off again."
 - "Godfrey, don't laugh any more at that.

 It teazes her—I know it does."
 - Did my father really --- "
- "No, no, to be sure not. It was her own doing. She snatched off her bonnet, and the rest of her head-dress followed."
- "Well, aunt Letitia, how has your mission sped ?"

"It has not sped at all. Mr. Vavasour was out; so I might as well have staid at home, for any good I have done. However, I've left a message asking him to tea this evening, and then I'll see what I can do. Heigh ho!" And, apparently, nearly exhausted, Miss Bransby, who was no longer even middle aged, threw herself into an easy chair. "What's that?" she inquired, after a few minutes' silence, and pointing to Harriet Brownlow's note.

Blanche mentioned the purport of the billet.

"Ha," said the old lady, "just like those Brownlows. I never had much opinion of either mother or daughter; and this proves I was correct. Asking you now, when there's not a creature at Westbourne but their stupid selves. Why couldn't they have had you last week, when the house was full of company?"

"Perhaps for that reason, aunt Letty. There might not have been room for me." "Pooh; there was plenty of room. They could have made room, if they wished it. But, the fact is Blanche, they did not want you then, so you were not invited. Now they have no better amusement, and do want you, and forthwith comes an invitation. Nothing but selfishness. It's the way of all the world, however; these Brownlows are not worse than other people—self, self, self, is the universal idol. Kindness is selfish; for those who shew it, look for some return. Friendship is selfish; for your friend expects to be amused or served. And love is selfish; for when two people are in love, they have neither thought nor care for any one beyond themselves."

"Would you have Blanche refuse this invi-

"By no means. It will be an advantage for her to go. To be on intimate terms with the first family here, sounds and looks well. Let her therefore do by Harriet Brownlow, as Harriet Brownlow has done by her—make a dom, Blanche." And Miss Bransby concluded with a laugh, half irony, half sneer.

"I don't like my aunt Letitia's philosophy," said Blanche to her brother, as they left the house together. "Her notions do not at a gree with mine. You smile, Godfrey—well laugh if you will; I do not, cannot, will no believe, that there is no such thing as genuin kindness or disinterested friendship to be meet with."

"I am afraid, Blanche, that when you are as old as our good aunt Letitia, you will not consider her opinion entirely unfounded."

"What a strange mixture she is !"

"I suppose she is what some people call rough diamond."

"Rather a pointed one. I will not say them, and Letitia actually cuts the feeling because there is always something which rather modifies her caustic speeches; but she certainly does prick them; and what renders this

more extraordinary is, that she usually makes the cruellest remarks at those times, when she is most warmly engaged upon some act of real kindness."

"Which only proves that our worthy relative is a bundle of contradictions; like a great many other people in this bizarre world."

I wonder whether she will succeed in persuading papa?"

Very probably. Women generally do conrive to carry any favourite point; and Miss ansby would almost worry a stone wall into

Miss Bransby made, however, very little imssion upon Mr. Vavasour. The time was
t when hopes of preferment could influence
the Vavasours of Newstoke Priors had,
felt, done all that might be expected from
on Godfrey's behalf; and as for the old
dy's notion respecting Blanche, it appeared
him too absurd to entertain even for a

expences his income would not justify? Or lay out money, which could not possibly produce an adequate return? The idea was an absurdity; and he left Miss Bransby's house very much annoyed by the impending visit; and fully determined that neither exertion nor sacrifice on his part, should render Laurel Cottage sufficiently agreeable to induce a repetition of the grievance.

Miss Bransby was more incensed with her impenetrable relation than she had ever been before; for, in addition to the mortification of finding her influence ineffectual, her arguments unheeded, she felt, and it was a very unpleasant impression, that as Edward Vavasour's reception and entertainment ought to be, in some degree commensurate with his station in society, and as the owner of Laurel Cottage refused to furnish the necessary funds, the expence must inevitably fall on her. And she

wake the greater portion of the night in a ate of high nervous irritability; blaming her ntumacious, mean-spirited nephew-in-law, d calculating the lowest expence per diem of dward's now, even to her, unwelcome visit. ind so startling did the ultimate reckoning pear, that in a sort of frenzy of vexation, Bransby darted out of bed, and began botting up and down her room, talking aloud; now deprecating Frederic Vavasour's covetcusness; then assuring herself, for no one else was present, that it was totally impossible she could incur so enormous an expenditure. And Miss Bransby did incur that frightful outby-did desire Blanche and Godfrey to make there necessary addition to their father's sordid house-keeping.

There are few sacrifices women will not make in favour of pride and appearance. Miss Bransby loved, she dearly loved her stock of worldly wealth; but better still she loved the vestige of the cold had disappeared, even before the news of Mr. Vavasour's arrival at Marshampton reached Blanche, her kind hostess would not suffer her to leave Westbourne.

"This air agrees with you, my dear Blanche," she said; "I'm confident it does. You never could have shaken off such an attack as easily as you have done, if Westbourne had not been particularly well adapted to your constitution. Yes, I'm satisfied that this place agrees with you; and I won't think of your returning to Marshampton till you're quite strong again; and that, my dear, you're not yet-you're not, indeed. Besides, Marshampton is damp; and damp climates are the destruction of young people. I attribute all my poor Harriet's delicacy to our spending a month last year at St. Leonards. Of course, if you're wanted at home, I must give you up; or, added the wily speaker, with much meaning, "if you wish to return. Perhaps you do-perriends now than when you met at Lady Alicia Raby's; and you would not like to be away when he arrives."

"No, no," cried Blanche; "Believe me, I shall much prefer remaining here. Godfrey can entertain my cousin; they will do very well without me; I have not the faintest wish to return home, I assure you. I would rather, far rather, stay with you and Harriet."

It was therefore settled that Blanche should remain at least a fortnight longer; provided Mr. Vavasour did not recal his daughter; or that Mr. Edward Vavasour did not make his appearance; or that Blanche herself should not wish to return.

"In either case," said Mrs. Brownlow, "you am go and return to us when most convenient by yourself; that is to say, after Mr. Vavasour in gone. For, to speak the truth, my dear blanche, I think that if he does come, you ought to pay him the compliment of being at

home; if it be only out of consideration for his father."

The next day, Edward Vavasour and Godfrey made their appearance at Westbourne. Blanche met her cousin with some little restraint of manner. She could not entirely forget his father's fruitless plan; nor could she fail of perceiving that Mrs. Brownlow watched her very closely; and the effect of such a circumstance upon a girl of Blanche's age and feelings, will always be undue reserve.

she did not return to Marshampton, although when speaking on the subject, Mrs. Brownlow had been, apparently, sincere; and our heroin had assented to an assertion, no one, in fact could possibly have questioned. But Mrs. Brownlow said nothing further of her leavin Westbourne; Blanche could not herself propose it, and when in Harriet's presence, Godfrey had no attention to bestow on any one busher.

During the young men's visit, two circuis

Edward was not at all the person he had been when enacting the part of host at Newstoke Priors; there was formality, rather than friend-liness, in his mode of addressing her: the second, that in his presence, Harriet was totally unlike herself. She appeared to have discarded all the vivacity, the dash, which usually characterised her manners, and to become quiet, almost to insipidity.

Two days after, Edward and Godfrey dined at Westbourne; and both impressions strengthmed. Edward spoke very little to Blanche; Harriet, scarcely to any one.

"What does it mean?" Blanche asked herleft, whilst an emotion of uneasiness, she endeavoured vainly to repress, crept over her
mind. "What can it mean? Are they, can
they be, attached? Oh! surely not. And per,
why, why, do I say that? They were staying
together at Sir William Tyrawley's, and what
more natural than that they should like each

other. Oh, yes, that is the case, and hence his visit to Marshampton. Poor Godfrey!"

Let it not be supposed that Mrs. Brownlow's scheme of retaining Blanche at Westbourne, found favour in the eyes of all parties; or, that it met with no opposition. Miss Bransby, for one, highly displeased by an arrangement which threatened to overturn her favourite castle, went to the unusual expense of hiring horses, and presented herself at Westbourne a few mornings after Edward Vavasour's arrival, just as the luncheon was announced. But, although she had gone determined to bring her great-niece back with her, and she was a person who seldom relinquished an intention once adopted, aunt Letitia came back alone. Lord Warleigh was at Westbourne; and it needed but a few whispered words from Mrs. Brownlow, and a quarter of an hour's observation, to assure Miss Bransby, that, in all probability, a more brilliant destiny awaited Blanche than that she had ventured to chalk out.

Miss Bransby left Westbourne in a state of lation not easily described. Her mind was in a perfect whirl-coronets and splendid places, diamonds and dashing equipages, appeared to dance before her eyes; while "his lordship" and "her ladyship" rung in her ears. Aunt Letty was really quite intoxicated with delight. Living as she had done, almost entirely in a secluded country village, and not belonging to the highest grade of even that restricted neighbourhood, it so happened, that although she had both heard and read of noblemen, she had never before in her whole life been in company with so exalted a personage. But now, not only had she spoken to a peer-not only had she sat at the same luncheon-table with the wearer of coronet-but that peer, that wearer of a coronet, was actually an admirer of her niece; and a very devoted admirer too; one who, in every probability, would, ere long, lay all his honours at her relation's feet.

Aunt Letty was indeed both proud and happy: in fact, to such a pitch did her exhila-

ration rise, that notwithstanding all the outlay she had recently incurred, urged by some sudden resolution, she pulled the checkstring of the carriage, and desired to be driven into Darford, a town of some importance in that part of the country; and alighting at the principal shop dedicated to the sale of such articles, she selected a handsome and expensive set of fursfurs were in fashion at the time I write of-which, according to her directions, were forwarded immediately to Westbourne, and there received by Blanche with equal pleasure and astonishment.

"It's a great deal of money, certainly," said aunt Letitia, as trembling from excessive excitement, she resumed her seat in the carriage." It's a great deal of money to lay out on furand I'm as poor as a church mouse just now-for a girl of Blanche's age, especially. My owned did not cost not nearly so much; but chinchills is more becoming to a girl than fitch. And then, if Blanche should marry Lord Warleigh.—Goodness, gracious me;—I can't believe it

ble !- A peeress !- Lady Warleigh !- how it sounds. And he's a good-looking young too; no - not exactly handsome (in ty, Lord Warleigh was very much the opte) nobody can say he's handsome; too e-and his hair's very nearly red; and I've otion that he's an odd sort of a squinting with one of his eyes; but he looks like a tleman; and then 'my Lord,' and 'your rdship,'-oh! delightful! How I do wish or, dear, old Mrs. Daventry was alive to ar this excellent news. And how wrong I s to speak of Mrs. Brownlow as I did! I s quite mistaken-she's a most charming, niable, friendly woman; evidently doing all e can to bring about this match. Yes, I as very much to blame. However, I will ver be uncharitable again. 'Your Ladyship,' ear, how well it sounds! To think, that I hould have a niece married to a lord! It's ary well I decided on Blanche's going to Vestbourne. The foolish girl wouldn't have since if it hadn't been for me: in such a full about that cousin of hers! However, it's no had that he should be here just now; it shows what good connexions she has got; and it's luck the that I put on my new figured satin bound and cloak this morning. I had half a mind now I was afraid the cloak might catch the came wheel and be stained; but I don't believe mischief has happened; one little spot, but the will easily rub off; and it is of the utmost in portunce that Blanche's family should cut respectable figure before Lord Warleigh—everybody must acknowledge that."

The next day, the good old lady enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing that her gift to the enbryo peeress was excessively becoming. Mrs. Brownlow and Blanche called on Miss Branchy; and Blanche looked so well and happy, that although Lord Warleigh was not in actual attendance, aunt Letitia felt satisfied that every thing was prospering; and, after their departure, it was with the greatest difficulty

that she could prevent herself from rushing forth and telling every creature, high and low, rich and poor, gentle and simple, that she knew, of the high honour awaiting Miss Vavasour.

Harriet, not particularly relishing aunt Letitia's stuffy parlour and prolix conversation, had driven on to a shop at Marshampton, where she had, she said, some purchases to make; and Mrs. Brownlow and Blanche, having parted from Miss Bransby, followed on foot. Midway, they met the two young Vavasours; and while Blanche was answering Godfrey's inquiries for Harriet, she heard Mrs. Brownlow invite Edward most cordially to Westbourne.

The civility was readily accepted; and an early day fixed for his transferring himself from his present mediocre resting-place, to Mrs. Brownlow's more luxurious residence. Blanche expected, and so, perhaps, did Godfrey, that his company would likewise be requested. But nothing of the kind took place; Mrs.

Brownlow, whose object was to discourage one gentleman as much as she desired to conciliate the other, merely inquired for his father, and bowing almost haughtily passed on.

Godfrey's mortification was evident; he coloured, looked down, struck his boots with his walking switch. Blanche's cheek reflected the warm glow which suffused his; and when Edward joined them at Westbourne, her greeting salutation was nearly as reserved as Mrs. Brownlow's parting one to Godfrey had been. She believed Edward Vavasour ought to have resented the slight offered to her brother, and declined an invitation involving a distinction thus invidious: and he had not met Mrs. Brownlow's overture with simple willingness; instead of this, he had been almost eager. Indeed, had curtailed the period he, himself, had allotted for remaining at Marshampton, in order that he might repair to Westbourne.

It was true, the magnet which attracted. Edward might be extremely powerful; the that she could prevent herself from rushing forth and telling every creature, high and low, ich and poor, gentle and simple, that she new, of the high honour awaiting Miss Vava-

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Taken by surprise, she could not restrain here tears.

"Dearest, dearest, Godfrey, why have you kept this such a secret? Why have you no told me you must be away so soon? I have been hoping, believing, that the evil day was far distant; and now, the news has come upon me so suddenly, that I can scarce believed that I must lose you. Indeed, you should have told me sooner."

"Nay, Blanche, where was the use of saddening you? Spoiling all the pleasure of your stay at Westbourne? Besides, until last night, I was not altogether sure myself. At least, not of the day."

"And when, when is that, Godfrey?"

"To-morrow week; if not earlier. Come, ome, don't be so foolish. You'll make a fool of me. And after all, the odds are, that we ought to be glad I'm going; for—for—I sometimes think I've been here long enough—too long, perhaps. When I come back it will all be over. Harriet will be married; and I ready to fall in love with the next pretty girl I happen to meet."

"Oh, yes, Godfrey; oh yes. You will love more happily, more worthily: for, although I like Harriet Brownlow very much, I don't consider her—"

"Not a word against Harriet. She's an openhearted, beautiful, girl; and if our fine gentleman relation had not thought fit to enter the lists with me, I think I should have had a chance of winning her. As it is, I don't blame her; not I—who can blame a girl for choosing to marry a man of large property, instead of a poor, pennyless sailor like me? Besides, Harriet's mother set herself against me."

Blanche was not sufficiently well pleased with Harriet to agree in Godfrey's eulogy. Still she forebore to contradict him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sorrowfully passed the next five days. On the sixth, Godfrey left Marshampton: and Blanche remained to bear alone Miss Bransby's fretfulness and never ending upbraidings for her precipitate return home.

"It was," urged the old lady, "the most foolish, ill-advised, thing I ever heard of in my whole life; to go and affront both those men at once."

"Perhaps, aunt Letitia, I have not offended either."

"I beg your pardon, Blanche, you have offended both: and there's an end of your marrying either. You offended Lord Warleigh by leaving Westbourne, when he was evidently meditating a proposal; and the proof the was displeased, is, that he left on the very day."

"Lord Warleigh's visit had already expired.

He would have taken his departure on Thursday, whether I remained or not."

"That doesn't follow. Indeed his remaining on, after, as you say, his visit was supposed have concluded, proves that he staid merely your account; and that if you had only gives him proper encouragement, he would have proposed; and then, Blanche Vavasour, you would have been a peeress, and have taker precedence of-but there's no use thinking what might have happened; you'll be no peeress now, that's very clear. Nor Mrs. Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, either; for, course, Mr. Edward Vavasour, who seems entertain a very fair opinion of himself, wasn particularly flattered by your flying off the more ment he came into the house. Never knew anything more ridiculous in all my born days

and after my sending you that beautiful chinchilla, too."

"My dear aunt, Edward Vavasour is paying his addresses to Harriet Brownlow."

"Nonsense-I don't believe a word of it; or, if he is, it's all your fault, you foolish girl. What did you go to Westbourne for, just at the time he was expected here? Indeed, Blanche, I think your behaviour very improper; I'm greatly disappointed, I assure you; and I don't fancy your father is over well satisfied. He says, everything was sadly mismanaged when Mr. Vavasour was here. Such extravagance and waste! And no comfort after all, I'll be bound; or Mr. Edward Vavasour wouldn't have caught so readily at Mrs. Brownlow's invitation as he did. Blanche, if he falls in love with Harriet Brownlow-nasty little flirting creature !- it will be every bit your fault; yes-every bit. Mr. Vavasour invited himself to your father's house in, certainly, a very suspicious manner; for, as for his coming there for the sake of the shooting on the

Marshampton moors, that's all nonsense—I don't believe he went out once. Besides, I heard him say myself, that he didn't care for shooting. Well, he comes, I say, to Laurel Cottage self invited, and what must you do, but choose that very time for going to Westbourne; and as if this was not being sufficiently ill-bred, when Mrs. Brownlow invites him there, nothing will serve you but coming home again; just as if all you wanted was to get away from him. After such folly and rudeness, I'm sure it's no wonder if he marries Harriet Brownlow only out of pique; I should do the same myself."

"If he does," said Blanche, haughtily, "it matters not to me."

"Oh yes; it's all very well to say that. But I can tell you, Blanche, that it does matter, or, at any rate, it ought to matter to you—a girl with hardly a shilling—whether you marry a man of large fortune or not. And if it does not matter, as I said before, it ought."

[&]quot;Ought?"

Yes, ought; on your father's and brother's unt it ought; Arthur's, especially. What's become of him, poor fellow, after I am e? Even as it is, I'm getting old, and I 't know how much longer I shall be able to after him. Yes, yes, you don't care wheyou marry well or badly now, because 're indulged in every way, and don't know at the want of money means. Dress, asement, travelling expences, all are proed for you; but that can't go on always; eed, as it is, there must be a stop to it, or I ll be in goal. Why, I declare, it was only s morning that I was looking over my acmts, and the quantity of money that I've out on your behalf within the last eight nths, is absolutely frightful: and, after all, have no good come of it-too bad, upon word. However, it's the last time I shall d money on such a fool's errand, that I am olved upon. So you may reckon on nothing e from me, Miss Vavasour."

Blanche was too seriously hurt to answer and Miss Bransby, having thus suffered her exasperation to exhale, fastened her bonnet strings and departed, leaving her auditor to brood over the miseries of being poor. But for his want of fortune, Godfrey's love might have proved successful; and but for hers, and the obligations she was consequently under to her aunt, she would have cut short Miss Bransby's reprimand; in place of writhing under unkindness, which present circumstances prevented her resenting or, at any rate, appearing to resent.

She was startled from her unpleasant reverie by the announcement of Mr. Edward Vavasour's name. The next minute he was in the room; and believing her evident dejection sprung entirely from Godfrey's loss, accosted her with kindness almost amounting to affection.

Blanche was touched.—When the spirits are depressed nothing overcomes so much as do tears; and, naturally, Edward's manner ew more soft, his language more consolatory. It is spoke of Godfrey, praised him warmly, welt long and with apparent pleasure on his milliant prospects; the almost certainty which it possessed of rising to the head of his profesion: and when Blanche, proud and grafied, had recovered something of her usual teerfulness, Edward changed the theme of inversation; varied it again, introducing many abjects all likely to interest his listener; and ach in turn handled with eloquence and grace.

Half an hour passed rapidly; and Blanche ras really sorry when she heard her father's roice. Five minutes afterwards she was as much surprised.

"Mr. Vavasour," said Edward, "although You promised to receive me for ten days or a fortnight, I staid, I think, scarcely a week. In I, then, come back? Will you re-admit to ?"

Of course, Mr. Vavasour could not but as-

sent; and Blanche, although she tried hard to maintain a stoical expression of countenance, was, and looked pleased, when she learnt that on the morrow Edward would return to dine and sleep.

The intelligence considerably revived Miss Bransby's good temper. She thought the matter not quite hopeless even yet; and believing, rightly enough, that the presence of a matronly chaperone would be advantageous to her niece, announced her intention of dining at Laurel Cottage on the following day.

"Yes, Blanche, I think it will look better for me to dine here one day, at all events; besides being a proper compliment to Mr. Vavasour. Very likely too, if those sluts of servants (your father always gets the worst servants in the whole neighbourhood) know I'm to be here, they'll take more pains about the dinner. So, my dear, at half-past four you may expect me. I wish we could get your father to dine a little later; these early hours are, I know, reckoned quite un-

ashionable; only, I suppose, if we did peruade him to wait till six, he would never suffer candles to be brought before dinner: and at this time of the year, you know, that would be very awkward. So, perhaps, it's just as well not to say anything about altering the hour."

And now, my readers must imagine the little drawing room at Laurel Cottage with its drawn curtains and blazing fire. Mr. Vavasour half asleep in a large morocco chair; aunt Letitia, attired in a silver grey chalis dress, French white cap, ribbons and scarf, engaged as usual a piece of carpet work; Blanche embroidering; and Edward seated next to Miss Bransby, remingly perfectly at home and well satisfied; talking a great deal to the old lady, who, naturally shrewd and full of observation, was, when in good humour, an agreeable companion enough; sometimes addressing Blanche or Mr. Vavasour. And if the young man's eyes, even when speaking to Miss Bransby, often rested

upon her niece, little marvel was there in the

The petty anxiety, inseparable from the reception of such a guest in such an establishment, had heightened Blanche's colour; and her eyes were bright, brighter even than their wont; while a half smile parted her lips, and evidenced with all certainty that Blanche was happy. Her grief at parting with her brother was for the time forgotten; so, likewise, the vexatious conversation which had raised such bitterness of heart but a few hours before.

At half past ten, precisely, Miss Bransby's servant was announced.

"Has William brought the lantern?" inquired the careful old damsel, while gathering her working implements together. "I hope so. I'm sure there's no moon; and I shan's like to have to pick my way through all the half melted snow without a light. Has William brought the lantern?" "Are you going to walk?" inquired Edward, manifestly a little surprised.

"My aunt invariably walks," Blanche answered.

"Yes; I like walking best-it's more independent."

"And saves money," Blanche dreaded would follow; but Miss Bransby shewed discretion.

"You see, Mr. Vavasour, I'm an old woman; and we old people have all our odd whims and fancies; mine is to walk wherever, and whenever, I can."

Blanche could have kissed her aunt for this deviation from sincerity; and still more for the tact which indited her reply—" old people, have their fancies." No one could be better aware of this, than the son of Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors, that very strange old man. Aunt Letty's parsimony would not be parsimony to Edward Vavasour; it would be eccentricity, and eccentricity is never reckoned vulgar.

"But he drinks wine, I dare say. No, don't ring the bell; there's no occasion for it. If the wine's here he will drink it; and, and, really I can't afford all this enormous cost. Such a dinner as we had—enough for six people at the very least. That was, I know, your foolish aunt Letitia's doing; but there's no necessity for our aping her absurdities; and, by the way, Blanche, what reason is there for wax candles?"

"They are likewise my aunt Letitia's doing," Blanche answered; not altogether as respectfully as perhaps was right.

"Well, as I said before, if she chuses to make a fool of herself, there's no necessity for my following her example; so say nothing about supper, unless you mean to get me sent to gool."

"Mr. Vavasour stays but three days."

"I wish I could be sure of that; I wish with all my heart and soul I could be certain that we are likely to get rid of him at the end of three days, or even five: but I'm very much mistaken if we don't have him here a great deal longer. From something he let fall after dinner, I've a notion that this young gentleman, who invites himself so coolly into other people's houses, means to favour us with his company for a fortnight, at the very least. And what puzzles me is, why he has taken this fancy into his head. As for your aunt Letita's nonsensical idea of his being in love with you, Blanche, nobody who sees you together, would hold it for a moment."

"When Mr. Vavasour intimated his intention of coming to Marshampton, he mentioned his attraction."

"You mean shooting? Pooh; he cares no more for shooting than your aunt Letitia does. All the time he was here before, Godfrey could only get him out once—at least, to shoot. He was ready enough to walk over to Westbourne; went there every day, I believe."

"I wonder," thought Blanche, "whether

Edward Vavasour will go over to Westbou as often now?" Then aloud, she suggested probability of an attachment between him : Harriet Brownlow.

Her father thought it very likely; but a impression did not reconcile him to Edwa Vavasour's visit with its consequent expension. Very greatly the reverse; and when return from accompanying Miss Bransby, the received young Vavasour received, was scarce within the limits of civility.

Despite her father's prohibition, Bland ordered in the refreshment tray. It was, she predicted, an empty form; Edward of clined everything, even wine and water; at the party separated for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

The next morning, while the inmates of Laurel Cottage lingered over the breakfast table, Hannah Hodge appeared before the window.

"One of your pensioners?" asked Edward.

"No, a market woman," Blanche answered; while she privately endeavoured to frown Miss Hodge away.

"Hannah, I don't want any of your fowls;
you ask too much for them," said Mr. Vavasour.

But as the window was closed, it may be that Hannah did not hear him; at any rate, she would not be easily repulsed; for, uncovering her basket, she drew forth a long black looking creature, all legs and wings, which she held up, screaming—

"Three-and-ten-pence! — three-and-ninepence-halfpenny, then!"

"No, no, Hannah."

"Well, three-and-eight-pence."

Mr. Vavasour shook his head, and shouted-

"I won't give more than three-and-sixpence."

"Three-and-six-pence!" shrieked the damsel; "three-and-six-pence for beautiful barndoor fowls like these?"

"Not one farthing more you'll get from me."

"Three-and-six-pence for such a fowl as this!" vociferated Hannah; holding up the most indifferent specimen of barn-door produce, to Edward's great apparent amusement.

Blanche passed into the adjoining room.

Exactly that which she feared had come to pass: her father's sordid parsimony had become a source of entertainment to the sarcastic Edward; and she felt both vexed and mortified.

"Mr. Vavasour's come off victorious," said Edward, joining her shortly afterwards. "He has triumphed over Hannah Hodge; the fowls are his for three-and-six-pence."

"Indeed," Blanche answered drily; so drily, that Edward resumed—

"You are not interested in housekeeping?"

"Not such as this; for what is there to make it interesting? Are not the details of such an establishment rather distressing than otherwise?"

"I think you take a wrong view of the case. Mr. Vavasour, probably experienced as much pleasure when successful in frustrating Hannah Hodge's attempts to overreach him, as politicians do when they baffle their opponents: or, the commander of an army, when he has gained a victory; or, to choose a less exalted illustration, as the owner of the horse that wins the Derby. It is all the same impulse, the same

game of life, played only on a narrower

"I cannot agree with you; I fear that it is not, alas! the feeling you describe, but his anxiety to avoid incurring debt, which renders papa, what shall I say? over economical. Such a spirit is one of the miseries of poverty."

"Mr. Vavasour is not poor."

Blanche smiled bitterly.

"Nay, I maintain your father is not poor," said Edward with much meaning; and he added, speaking very quickly, "at least, Lord Warleigh would not judge him so."

Blanche smiled again; but not now bitterly: and she coloured, as she turned the conversation, by asking Edward what he thought of some new music she and Harriet had been trying, the last evening she spent at Westbourne.

This naturally led to the production of sweet sounds. Blanche went over one or two of the auditor's request, sang an old provençale lay, a great favourite with Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors. And Newstoke Priors now became their theme; a subject upon which Edward discoursed with far more ease than did Blanche, for obvious considerations. Still, she did talk of Newstoke Priors; and, at length, caught some of the warmth and interest with which he seemed to dwell on different circumstances connected with that place, or with her visit there.

Mrs. Revely was mentioned amongst other things and individuals.

"Have you been again to Coningsby?" inquired Blanche.

"No, indeed. I don't imagine I shall ever honour Coningsby again with my presence. Mrs. Revely, however, I have since met in company more than once. She spoke of you. Do you know, I really believe her a very well-meaning person."

"I hope Mrs. Revely did not say as much for me. I should be sorry to be considered well-meaning."

"Shall I tell you what she said?"

"No, no; I dare say it is nothing I should like to hear."

"What is your objection to the term, wellmeaning?"

"I dislike it, because we never call clever people, well-meaning; nor those who are agreeable, or even useful. A well-meaning person means a silly, officious, tiresome, often mischiefmaking, individual; who goes about saying and doing all sorts of disagreeable things, without actually intending harm; and he or she escapes censure, because supposed to be well-meaning. Oh—I can't bear well-meaning people."

"If your definition be correct, my epithet was inappropriate. Mrs. Revely cannot be called officious or interfering in the concerns of her neighbours, seeing she has not a thought or a care for any one beyond her own children. She is, in fact, in this respect, too selfish to be even well-meaning."

- "Mr. Vavasour, how severe you are."
- "You set me the example."
- "Nay, nay, mine was a general definition."
- "While my application and addition were personal; and there is just the difference between legitimate satire and malicious stricture."
- "Please ma'am, Mrs. Turner has called," said the handmaiden, opening the door.
- "Ask Mrs. Turner to walk in here."
- "She's gone into master's study. She wanted to speak to him about the new clothing society."
- "Well, shew Mrs. Turner in here when she and papa have concluded their consultation. No, don't go," said Blanche, addressing Edward, who had risen. "Don't go away. You will be pleased with Mrs. Turner."
 - "She is not then a well-meaning person?"
 - "Not according to my idea of the term.

Mrs. Turner is a most superior being; talented, good, uninitie, pious."

"Oh, he," cried Edward, "then I must be cell. Any one you praise so highly, must be far too good for me. And—and—in truth, I ought to go. There is a visit I must pay this morning."

" Westhourne? Not to Westhourne?" thought Blanche; while Edward added—

"Miss Bransby has been kind enough to desire me to call upon her; I should have done it long ago, but I don't know how it happened, something always occurred to prevent me; and Godfrey was ever better pleased to bend his steps in another direction. But I will delay no longer improving my acquaintance with Miss Bransby. Do you think, that as a family connexion, she would admit me at this early hour?"

"Oh, yes," said Blanche; only afraid that her aunt Letitia would shew herself too much delighted by the honour. "Farewell, then, for the present," and he ft the room as Mrs. Turner entered.

"A very fine young man that, indeed," she observed. "Exceedingly gentlemanlike and well bred. Such an air, too; how one can always tell the man of fashion by a single glance."

Here Mrs. Turner checked herself. The slight flush on Blanche's cheek, and the bright glancing of her eye caught the attention of her watchful friend; who felt, that to praise Edward Vavasour, to increase an interest on his behalf, already, possibly, too vivid, might be neither kind nor prudent. Most unlikely was it that a man endowed with Edward's personal advantages, uniting in himself so much that the world admires and esteems, would marry one so slenderly provided for as Blanche. He might admire her, flirt with her, amuse himself with her; even, perhaps, make love; but nothing further. Besides, Mrs. Turner was aware, that rumour gave him to Harriet

Brownlow; and in this respect, she apprehended, rumour might be correct. Therefore, she said no more in praise of Edward Varasour; and, perhaps, for the first time since they had known each other, Blanche found her friend's conversation devoid of interest.

Nor was she particularly pleased when Ma-Turner proposed their walking together it i direction quite opposite to that part of Mashampton where Miss Branshy's timmicis as situated. But as she had no reasonable potext for declining the purposition, the waladies set off.

On her return, Blanche observed a trabustle in the house; and inquiring in a learnt from a servant that Mr. Lower trasour intended leaving Marshamon and ately; that he meant, in fact, a man to evening's mail for town and in the she heard, that the receipt in a least a of the cabinet ministers, we have "They want me to take office; to make me under secretary for the colonies. I ought, I suppose, to be highly gratified; but, but, I scarcely feel the honour as I should have done some months ago. I'm getting tired of a public life; growing old and lazy I believe; and I have more than half a mind to write and tell L. so. But my father (I have a letter also from him) evidently wishes me to accept the appointment. At all events, he would be hurt if I declined it without some more rational reason than I find myself prepared to give."

"Is Mr. Vavasour quite well?" inquired

"Perfectly. At least, I hope it, as he says nothing of his health. Indeed, he writes but a few lines mentioning the report of my taking office, and his wish that I should go to town without delay."

"Mr. Vavasour is not in London?"

"He is there now; but he leaves it the

day after to-morrow; so that unless I set of this very afternoon, I shall miss him, which would, I know, annoy him greatly: still, I feel more than half inclined to write."

"Better not," said Blanche's father. "Never write when you have the power of speaking a there may be a hundred circumstances connected with this secretaryship which might make its acceptance undesirable; as man that would tell the other way; neither of which you would, perhaps, elicit by writing."

"True," replied Edward, looking hurt
Blanche thought quite justifiably; for not one
syllable expressive of regret for his guest's
departure, or of desire that he would repeath
his visit, escaped her churlish father's lips
And Edward, the courted, admired, flattere
Edward Vavasour, was suffered to leave Marshampton with scarcely the expression of sorrow or hope, customary on parting with event
those whose society is irksome to us.

A trifling cold confined Miss Bransby to her

amply repaired the omission. Blanche did more than once essay to rectify her father's rudeness. But she succeeded ill. Her spirits were unusually low; a degree of timidity, of which she really felt ashamed, but which she could not master, seemed to paralyse her; and the words she would have spoken died e'er she uttered them.

"Well, I'm glad he's gone," said Mr. Vavasour, after seeing his accomplished kinsman to
the gate of that dwelling, where he had been,
it would seem, such an unwelcome guest.
"I'm glad he's gone at last; and I hope, with
all my heart, he won't think proper to come
back again. But that's not very likely. The
Brownlows will be going soon, I take it; so
he and Miss Harriet may make up their matters in London, if they choose."

Blanche murmured something about their dinner engagement for that day.

"What? Oh, we are to dine with your

aunt to-day—I remember. But I don't think I shall go; she wears me to death. Besides, I feel as if I had caught cold, too. You had better dine with her, however; she'll be affronted if we all stay away. What was the message Edward Vavasour left for her?"

"Only his excuses."

And wishing most earnestly that she might likewise have escaped aunt Letitia's dinner, Blanche went to make the necessary alteration in her dress.

CHAPTER X.

Miss Bransby had provided an, according to her opinion, unexceptionable dinner. She had withdrawn the brown holland coverings from the chairs and sofas in her best drawing-room; had attired herself in a lemon-coloured Irish poplin gown; had brushed Arthur's shaggy locks into a caricature copy of Edward's mode of dressing his dark, glossy hair; had arranged his stock, also, according to the same model. And now was aunt Letitia seated near the bright fire, in the spruce-looking room, with her charge by her side; and, in her hand, a fan, which, in the trepidation of her mind, she twirled and twisted, and, at length, broke. She was, however, far too happy to heed a

master, which, occurring under other circumstances, would have perilled her good humour for a week; and she continued quite pleased, quite lappy, smiling perpetually, and sometimes speaking to herself-for that was a common trick of hers. Her mind, too, was busily engaged, endeavouring to collect all the materials for conversation that might amuse or interest her more than welcome guest. And when the door-bell announced, as she believed, Mr. Vavasour's arrival, she sprang up, but instead of advancing, continued where she was, shifting herself from one foot to the other, like a restless horse. If it had been an accepted lover Miss Bransby was expecting, hardly could she have betrayed greater emotion.

Let the reader, then, imagine her dismay and disappointment when Blanche, and Blanche only, entered the room; and imparted the startling news of Edward Vavasour's departure. Completely overwhelmed, aunt Lecture stood for some seconds perfectly mane; her mouth wide open, and her eyes stretched to

- "My dear," she cried, at length; "what do you tell me? Mr. Vavasour is gone; has actually left Marshampton?"
- "Yes, my dear aunt, he left us scarcely an hour ago."
- "But why? What in the name of wonder took him off in such a hurry?"

Blanche recapitulated her story.

- "Very odd, indeed. The most extraordinary thing I ever heard."
- "I don't see any oddity about it," said Arthur. "Mr. Edward Vavasour's been made a minister; at least, he may be made one, if he likes it; and he would be a great fool, a great fool, indeed, if he didn't go and see about it. I'm sure, I wish Lord L would make me a minister. I'd soon shew them how to keep those rascally radicals in order, that I would."

Mr. Edward Vavasour should go off in such a hurry. He was quite right to accept the appointment, nobody can deny that; but then, you know, there was no occasion whatever for his flying off in this violent hurry; putting us all into such a trepidation: when he was engaged to dine with me, too. He should have taken the matter more soberly—written his acceptance of the appointment, and gone to town, quietly, to-morrow or the next day."

"But Blanche says, his father wants him there directly."

"Fiddlestick, his father! His father might have waited another day in town. Just think of all the trouble I've been at about his dining here; and then to have him disappoint me. It's very tiresome, indeed. So much expense, too, to get a proper dinner; and now there's nobody to eat it. And here comes William to announce dinner. Dear, dear, what

a disappointment! I declare I shan't be able to touch a morsel."

The aspect of the repast she had so carefully provided, did not serve to raise Miss Bransby's spirits; and by degrees, her disappointment giving way to peevishness, Blanche, as usual, became the subject of many cutting observations. Miss Bransby's feelings, howmer, appeared to be divided. She was angry with Edward for departing; and angry with Blanche on account of his departure; angry with her for going to Westbourne; and, again, for leaving Westbourne. Then, looking more complacently, she murmured, that bad as it was for a portionless girl to throw away a chance of marrying, even that was better than a wealthy heiress choosing to unite herself with a wild spendthrift. "Yes, certainly, no marriage was better than a bad marriage." An idea, which appeared to give so much satisfaction to Miss Bransby, that as the evening wore away, so did the dark cloud Edward's departure had

raised up; and she became chatty and communicative.

"I'll tell you what, Blanche," she said,
"although I'm monstrously provoked at Mr.
Vavasour's flying off in this way, for I'm
afraid it doesn't look well for you, there's one
thing which pleases me, he won't offer to
Harriet Brownlow, that's certain. She won't
have the pleasure of refusing him: I've put a
stop to the love making there."

" Have you, indeed?"

"Yes; I told Mr. Vavasour this morning what a flirt Miss Brownlow is, and all about her attachment."

"I never heard that Harriet was attached to anybody."

"I have, though. And from very good authority; and what's more, I know she means to marry the man when she's her own mistress; which won't be, you know, till she's five-and-twenty. Her father settled that. They say Mrs. Brownlow influenced him; and I think it very probable."

- " Who told you all this?"
- "Never mind who told me. My authority is good; but I'm not at liberty to give the name. I didn't even to Mr. Vavasour."
- "Did you really tell Mr. Vavasour?" asked Blanche, faintly; for she feared she saw the clue to Edward's hasty departure.
 - "Yes, I did. And, to say the truth, I shouldn't wonder if this had something to do with his being in such haste to get away."
 - "Yes, yes. I have no doubt of it."
 - "Aye," pursued Miss Bransby, without beeding Blanche's answer; "I told Edward Vavasour to take care what he was about with Harriet Brownlow. And I'll tell you, Blanche, what I said to him concerning you."
 - "Oh, what did you say of me?"
 - "Why, that Lord Warleigh admires you excessively; and that very likely, it will be a match."

- "My dearest aunt, how could you! Lord Warleigh is Edward Vavasour's most intimate friend."
 - "Well, supposing he is?"
 - " He may tell him."
 - "There's no harm if he does."
- "You forget, that in speaking of the probability of a marriage between Lord Warleigh and me, you insinuated that I am attached to him."
- "Well, if I did, it's no harm-no harm whatever."
- "No harm Lord Warleigh should be told I am in love with him?"
- "No, Blanche; for he's decidedly in love with you; and would have offered, if you hadn't thrown cold water on his suit, by leaving Westbourne as you did. Now don't go on contradicting me; you know, I am a few years older than you are; and must be a better judge of every thing."

Blanche could not see the truth of the argu-

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ment Miss Bransby advanced; a very common one, it shall not be denied; she, however, acquiesced in her aunt's rejoinder; in fact, she was only too glad to let the subject drop.

CHAPTER XI.

Two days subsequent to Edward's departure, Mrs. Brownlow called at Laurel Cottage. She came early, unaccompanied by Harriet; and she expressed considerable satisfaction on finding Miss Vavasour alone.

"Yes, my dear Blanche, I'm glad to find you by yourself; for, to say the truth, I want to have a little confidential conversation with you; to speak to you about a certain friend of ours who, if I mistake not, would require very little to bring him to your feet. You guess who, I dare say. Yes, yes, I see you know—that blush, nay don't be frightened, I won't tell, I won't indeed: but it's a pity Lord War-

leigh can't see you now; blushing becomes you amazingly."

Blanche tried to laugh her blush away.

"Well, my dear, not to prolong unnecessarily a discussion which perhaps distresses you, I'll come to the point at once; and ask you what your opinion of that young man is likely to be, if he should propose?"

"When Lord Warleigh does me the honour you mention, will it not be time to ascertain my sentiments regarding him?"

"Yes, under ordinary circumstances. But the fact is this. You see, my dear Blanche, Lord Warleigh was a little hurt, a little offended by your abrupt return home." Vexed by the renewal of her aunt Letitia's animadversions, Blanche could not restrain an expression of impatience—"Nay, nay, Blanche, your conduct was pointed, had all the appearance of intentional discouragement; and you are aware, Lord Warleigh is a man not much accustomed to discouragement. Well, my dear, he wasn't

pleased, I know; and went away rather in a tangent. At the same time, it's no secret that he admires you prodigiously; and I think that a very little management would bring him round again."

"Indeed, Mrs. Brownlow, I entertain no wish on that head. However flattered by the preference with which he has distinguished me, my feelings towards Lord Warleigh are those of indifference; or, at the utmost, do not pass beyond esteem."

Mrs. Brownlow looked earnestly at Blanche. "You cannot, surely, have entertained a previous attachment?" And Blanche, taken by surprise, paused e'er she answered. "My sweet Blanche," said Mrs. Brownlow, preventing a rejoinder which would, of course, have been a negative, "you astonish me. So very young, living in such entire seclusion, to whom can you have lost that little fluttering heart? Well, well, my dear, I won't ask. We'll say no more upon this subject; I see that it annoys

shortly to Lord Daventry's; and it's not unlikely that Lord Warleigh may be there:—if he should, shall I try and bring this matter on again? Don't you think, can't you believe, in consideration of Lord Warleigh's rank, and fortune, and influence, you might overcome your attachment? Indeed, I believe you might. These girlish predilections are often little more than imagination."

"Mrs. Brownlow," cried Blanche, "indeed, indeed, you are mistaken, utterly mistaken."

"Well, then," said Mrs. Brownlow, with her dark penetrating eyes fastened on Blanche, "there's nothing more to say about it. If Lord Warleigh should mention you, in any particular manner, I shall reply, by assuring him that you entertain the strongest sentiments of friendship for him, but that you cherish no preference. Is not that right?"

"Quite," rejoined Blanche; rejoiced to per-

ceive that her visiter was preparing to take leave.

"When shall we see you again at Westbourne Park? Nay, but you must come once
more before we go to Marsfield. However,
I shall leave Harriet to settle that; and mentioning her name reminds me that, perhaps,
it will be better, more delicate, as well as more
honourable towards Lord Warleigh, not to
tell Harriet what we have been discussing.
On your own account, also, silence is desirable; the less that is said about such things the
better; girlish attachments—"

"I assure you, I have no attachment-"

"I shall keep your secret most religiously," and Mrs. Brownlow nodded her head in the most provokingly incredulous manner. "Your aunt, Miss Bransby, even your father—unless you think the disclosure absolutely necessary, I should not recommend your telling either of them. It might by some means reach Lord

Warleigh's ears, and greatly irritate his feelings. Indeed, my sweet child," said Mrs. Brownlow, issing Blanche, "you will, believe me, act is ely in preserving entire silence upon this ubject."

I certainly shall follow your advice,"
Blanche answered, with perfect sincerity.

She was not on terms of habitual confidence with her father; and as for her aunt Letitia, there was no saying of what absurdity she might not become guilty, were she made aware of this fresh evidence of Lord Warleigh's attachment.

Mrs. Brownlow drove straight home, and betaking herself to her dressing-room, indited the following letter to the young peer.

"Dear Lord Warleigh,

"In accordance with the wish expressed in the letter with which your lordship favoured me, I have spoken to Miss Vavasour; and I

very much regret I have it not in my power to transmit a more gratifying reply. Miss Vavasour is perfectly alive to the honour you have conferred upon her; at the same time she finds it impossible to accede to the wish you entertain. Esteem, gratitude, and the sincerest friendship, being the utmost she can offer. Such were, almost, her very words, coupled of course with many expressions of regret at the pain she was inflicting. For my own part, I will not speak of sympathy; for although I love Blanche Vavasour, as your lordship's real friend, I cannot but rejoice that you have escaped an engagement with a girl in many respects so utterly unworthy the distinguished honour of being Lord Warleigh's wife. In strict confidence, however, I may I think impart to you the true reason of Miss Vavasour's otherwise unaccountable decision-her affections are engaged. I will add nothing further to this unpleasant communication;

out begging your acceptance of my daughter's and my own warmest assurances of regard,

"Subscribe myself,
"Your lordship's very sincere friend,
"Emma Brownlow."

"Westbourne Park, Thursday."

"It is, I hope, scarcely necessary to say that Harriet is perfectly ignorant of the contents of this note."

"That will do," said Mrs. Brownlow, sealing the letter with considerable haste; for she saw Harriet, who was out on horseback, ride up to the hall door. "Hearts are caught at the rebound; and if Edward Vavasour and Harriet do not become attached, as I very much believe they will, Lord Warleigh may yet be my son-in-law. Once, he certainly admired Harriet; and if this Blanche Vavasour had not come in the way, would, I've no doubt, have proposed. A pretty thing, indeed,

that such a girl should supplant my daughter!
But, I fancy, here's an end of Miss Vavasour's
becoming Lady Warleigh. This letter will
settle the business, or I'm very much mistaken."

When the missive was despatched, did Mrs-Brownlow experience no compunction, either towards the frank-hearted young noblemars who had reposed implicitly on her? or, on behalf of the unsuspecting being, whose world interests she had injured?

Did her conscience not upbraid her with the trust she had betrayed—the false dealing she had practised? Did her heart not remind her, that the young creature she at first misled, and afterwards misrepresented, was motherless? And more than that, the child of a once beloved companion? No—she felt none of this; or, if emotions of this nature did arise, they were quickly stifled.

A worldly-minded and ambitious mother, the main aim of Mrs. Brownlow's existence was Harriet's aggrandizement; and in common with the majority of mothers of this stamp, she entirely believed, that the end would justify any means she might have recourse to. To marry her daughter highly, was, she averred, a mother's duty; and every other obligation ought, surely, to give way before this most important obligation. Had not Harriet's supposed welfare been in-mother might have acted fairly enough; for she was rather partial both to Lord Warleigh and Blanche Vavasour; but she believed her daughter's interests implicated,

"And where a daughter's in the case, You know all other things give place."

Blanche's feelings, what were they? Was she perfectly indifferent to the flattering distinction of having been the object of Lord Warleigh's choice? In truth, no. What girl

of nineteen would not have been elated on a similar occasion? What woman of any age would not have known, that next to the éclat of being the possessor of rank and wealth, comes the triumph of having rejected such advantages. Besides, with all her pride of family, Blanche Vavasour was not conceited; far from it-she was rather inclined to depreciate than over-estimate her personal attractions. She had not been used to flattery. Aunt Letitia was the last person in the world to pay compliments to any one, least of all to adulate her own great-niece. On principle, Mrs. Turner would have checked any disposition tending towards vanity in her young pupil. On principle, likewise, Mr. Vavasour would have discouraged a sentiment calculated to entail greater expenditure than he judged desirable; and among general acquaintance of friends, there were few who considered the daughter of an unbeneficed clergyman worth the trouble of complimenting.

She was not, then, conceited. At least, she had not been till now; for vain were it to deny, that finding herself undoubtedly beloved by a man, whom women of birth, and beauty, and large fortune would gladly have espoused, a sentiment that savoured not a little of self-satisfaction, did creep into her bosom. And that Lord Warleigh was attached to her, Blanche could no longer doubt. She knew mough of Mrs. Brownlow, to feel confident that without very good authority, that lady would never have spoken as she recently had done.

Blanche thought a little, also, of the young peer's lordly dwelling; and contrasted it with her own comfortless, often unhappy, home; of Godfrey, too, whose advancement in life would have been accelerated by his close connexion with Lord Warleigh. And once she questioned, whether she had acted wisely in rejecting a man who had, in truth, so much

to recommend him. The doubt, however, was but of brief endurance.

"No, no; it would not do. I could not marry Lord Warleigh. I do not think I shall ever marry anybody."

CHAPTER XII.

IT chanced that Edward Vavasour was breakfasting with Lord Warleigh, when Mrs. Brownlow's letter was delivered.

Misled by Miss Bransby's assertions, unhappily retailed to him by Edward, the young man anticipated a very different result to the negociation with which he had commissioned Harriet's mother; and chagrined beyond the power of restraint, he threw the open letter to Edward, exclaiming angrily:

- "See how that cousin of yours, Blanche Vavasour, has treated me! Confounded little jilt. Vavasour, why did you mislead me in that infernal manner?"
 - " My dear fellow, I merely repeated the

opinion expressed by one of Miss Vavasour's nearest relations."

"Yes; that old hag, Miss Bransby. Hazz her! She deserves to be well shaken and turned inside out, for getting me into such a scrape."

"She was mistaken, and so was I; and I grieve from my heart for the misapprehension, Warleigh; but, beyond an error—"

"Well, well; say no more about it. Miss Bransby was mistaken, you were mistaken, I was mistaken, and the consequence of it all is, that I've made a fool of myself. However, it is the first time, and I'll take good care that it's the last, I put it into any woman's power to say, she has played Lord Warleigh off." Then, suddenly recollecting that Mrs. Brownlow's communication respecting Blanche's attachment was strictly confidential, the irritated nobleman snatched up the letter.

But Edward had already mastered its contents.

- "Any news?" shortly after, asked Lord Warleigh, in a voice of forced composure, while tearing Mrs. Brownlow's letter into the minutest fragments. "Anything new, to-day?"
- " Plenty of abuse of me," said Edward, throwing down an anti-ministerial journal.
 - " You take it coolly enough, however."
- "Oh, these are the sweets of office; some of those pleasures public men must make up their minds to bear philosophically. Good morning."
 - " Off, already?"
- "I should have been in Downing Street, at least half an hour ago. You'll be at White's, I suppose? I shall drop in when my hour of emancipation comes."
 - " No. I'm obliged to leave town."
 - " Ave ?"
- "Only for a few days. I must run down to the Isle of Wight, and see my mother and sister; they've been expecting me this month."

They shook hands, and parted. Edward hurried off in the direction of Downing Street, with his mind infinitely more engrossed with Blanche Vavasour's soft blue eyes, and her low, musical voice, than with his official duties, or with his friend's disappointment.

In truth, Edward felt but little anxiety on that account; he knew Lord Warleigh was not a man to break his heart for love of any woman; moreover, he stood, himself, in that predicament when men are very seldom otherwise than selfish.

"Blanche has refused him, then. She loves another. Who is that other? Pshaw! What a blockhead I have been. I might have lost her by my folly. But it is not too late."

That evening's mail conveyed a letter from Edward Vavasour to Blanche.

Our heroine was so entirely impressed with the conviction of his attachment to Harriet, that for some little time she questioned whether the aforesaid letter had not been misdirected; and when convinced that she was indeed the individual honoured by Mr. Edward Vavasour's addresses, although her colour did alternate and her respiration quicken, it was rather from surprise, and from that undefinable emotion which almost every woman feels on those particular occasions, than from joy.

Convinced that she was an object of indifference to Edward, Blanche had resolutely combated her predilection in his favour; as she believed successfully; nor did there appear anything in his present overture calculated to shake this assurance; for the proposal, viewed as she considered it, contained little either to gratify her self-complacency, or awaken her gratitude, or recal her affection.

"No, no. He had been influenced by motives no woman could have hailed with satisfaction." And Blanche imagined she was acting with only common sense and delicacy when she wrote a kind but decided negative.

Edward's anticipation of a favourable issue

Warleigh's. Indeed, his expectation took even a more substantial basis: for the peer had rested his hopes mainly on his pretensions; while, on reviewing the last eight months, Edward fancied he could detect evidence of affection on Blanche's side; and the idea transported him.

"Beautiful, beautiful, Blanche!" he mentally exclaimed. "How happy you shall be! How tenderly beloved, how anxiously watched over! You shall not have a wish, no, not the shadow of a wish, ungratified. Your life shall be a fairy tale; or as a southern summer's day—brightness, without a cloud. Love, happiness, devotion, these, these, shall be your portion; without a care, without one single shade of ill!"

And when her answer to his letter came, like a love-sick girl, he pressed the superscription to his lips; for there her hand had traced his name. Two minutes afterwards, his cheek was blanched, his lip quivered with rage. But not a word escaped him. He did not, like Lord Warleigh, give utterance to his exasperation; then, perhaps forget the bitter feeling, even forgive its cause. Not one syllable escaped his lips; but, in his inmost heart he all but cursed Blanche Vavasour.

passions, of unforgiving temper. Pride was the mainspring of his character, and on that a deadly wound had been inflicted; a wound, which even time might scarcely heal: and never might the hand which dealt the blow, obtain forgiveness. No, till his dying hour, she, he had loved so passionately, should be to him an object of dislike, almost of abhorrence.

And although, eventually, the fierce emotions which convulsed him, partially calmed down, Edward Vavasour was changed. A furious tempest had swept over him, and desolation followed in its track. All that was soft and gentle in his disposition, all that was bright and beautiful, was from that fatal hour mared, indeed, utterly obliterated; while the rugged, the harsh, the unlovely, acquired fresh makedness and fresh deformity.

CHAPTER XIII.

epistle, Mrs. Brownlow's empty carrew up before the gate of Laurel Cotnd a verbal message was transmitted s Vavasour, "Miss Brownlow, not ell enough to leave the house, would ch gratified if her friend would spend ours with her."

the readily complied; and on reaching urne, was shewn at once to Harriet's room, whose occupant she found in the certainly; but in no other respect, r, shewing token of the invalid.

sh me joy!" cried Harriet, eagerly em-

followed in its track. All that was soft and gentle in his disposition, all that was bright and beautiful, was from that fatal hour marred, indeed, utterly obliterated; while the rugged, the harsh, the unlovely, acquired fresh naledness and fresh deformity. felicity, or hurt by my reserve upon this subject, or curious to hear all about 'mon futur?'"

"I hope I am not envious; I am sure I am not offended; inquisitive, perhaps I may be. Describe Mr. Greville to me; make me acquair ted with him."

"Ind tell you all about our love. Eh bien, je ne demande pas mieux. To say the truth, I have been dying to do that more than once, but something always stopped me; perhaps I fancied you would lecture instead of sympathising. Besides, I hate gossiping about love matters. The men say, we women like to talk of nothing else when we get together; but that's a calumny."

"Tell me first, however," said Blanche, while Harriet paused, as if to gather her thoughts; "tell me, if you are really indisposed? For, indeed, excepting this room and your dressing-gown, I can detect nothing of the invalid."

"Indisposed? Oh no; I never felt better To be sure, I didn't close my eyes the whole of last night; but it was from excitement, happiness. As for my dressing-gown, I kept it on, my dear, in order that you and I might have a quiet hour to ourselves. Now for my tale .-You know, that mama and I were at St. Leonard's, last year. When there, I formed acquaintance, or rather, I renewed acquaintance, for we had been dancing acquaintances for some time, with Mr. Sydney Greville, nephew to Sir William Greville, and Lieutenant in the - Dragoons, Well, Blanche, we had, say, been acquainted formerly; but I believe never thought much of each other; at least I'm sure, I didn't. Sydney swears he was always in love with me, which may be true on not: at any rate, I never cared for him, until we met at St. Leonard's: when, being thrown a good deal together (he was the only man in the place worth speaking to) and having no thing better to amuse myself with, I fell =

love—really in love; and agreed to bestow on Sydney this fair hand, and everything else I shall ever have to give, five thousand a year amongst the rest."

Mr. Greville, I suppose, has very little fortune?"

Fancy mama's dismay! No, you can't; not even your imagination, vivid as it is, could portray the horror with which she learnt the engagement. I never had such a scene with her in all my life; except, perhaps, one day, when being a naughty, fractious, little girl, I slapped my governess' face."

"Mrs. Brownlow I conclude, said 'No.' I mean to Mr. Greville's suit?"

"Yes. Mrs Brownlow said 'No;' Miss Brownlow 'Yes;' and both were quite in earnest. Unhappily, however, as I cannot marry without mama's consent till I am fiveand-twenty, her negative was of more importance than my affirmative. The engagement therefore, was broken off: and I, you know coughed and grew thin, and lost my gaiety and appetite. In short, was, very nearly, foolist enough to fret myself into a consumption."

"And, in consequence, Mrs. Brownlow relented?"

"By no means. Mama relents, not because her non-compliance might end fatally for me but because Sydney's prospects have lately un dergone material change; he is no longer poor man, and, consequently, nobody—but the heir to a baronetcy and fifteen thousand a year; therefore, an appropriate husband for Miss Brownlow."

"What occasioned this revolution? Oh, know—his cousin's death. I remember seein in the paper, that Sir William Greville has just lost his only son."

"Exactly! Mr. Greville has been considerate enough to take himself out of the way and Sydney, as I have told you, being in our

Committee Commit

woman's life; and I can believe it. Oh, here's mama, how tiresome!"

Mrs. Brownlow entered, looking as consequentially complacent as the mama of the bride elect of a man, the heir to a baronetcy and fifteen thousand a year, might be reasonably expected to appear. She was in the best possible humour with herself, her daughter, indeed with all the world. An appeal, of whatever extent, to her benevolence made at this juncture, would have been favourably received. Even a request requiring personal exertion would not have been refused; so greatly had her heart become enlarg ed, so much was it overflowing with good-wil to all mankind in consequence of her daughter prospective grandeur. She overwhelmed Har riet with caresses; and more than once, ever fondled Blanche. Indeed, now that the forme appeared likely to contract thus flourishing a alliance, Mrs. Brownlow could not forbear re gretting the deception she had practised to wards Lord Warleigh: and by way of retriba

tion, she finally resolved, that if it could by any possibility be managed, she would still bring about a marriage between him and Blanche.

" I dare say, I shall be able to arrange it without any great difficulty. He is very much in love, and as for her not liking him, that's all nonsense. I fancy it wouldn't require a great deal of persuasion to make a girl, with nothing but her pretty face to recommend her, discover she can do something more than esteem a young man of eight-and-twenty, who offers her a coronet. Oh yes, I shall be able to bring this matter on again. And if I can't, why there's her cousin, Edward Vavasour; he will do as well, or better, for he is a handsome man, and quite as rich as Lord Warleigh, if not richer. Yes, Edward Vavasour would make a capital match for Blanche; and I have more than once suspected that he is inclined to admire her: so if I jumble them well together, which will be the

easiest thing in the world when she is staying with us in Hill Street, the chances are, that he will offer."

Such was the tenor of Mrs. Brownlow's thoughts on leaving her daughter's dressingroom; while Harriet, with much more truth than filial piety, exclaimed:

"My dear Blanche, did you ever hear any thing like mama? I mean like the way she eulogizes Sydney Greville. To listen to her, would not any one suppose, that she is personally attached to him? I thought she never would have done praising and admiring him; and yet, only a few days back, she would have stigmatised him as mercenary, because, being himself poor, and having found a woman of fortune willing to unite her lot with his, he was anxious to avail himself of the circumstance. And, then, he was an unprincipled spendthrift, because having an income entirely inadequate to the expences of his profession, the poor fellow contracted some trifling debts.

And a gambler, because he once lost fifty

Pounds at roulette. But all that is forgotten

now; and Sydney has become every earthly

thing he ought to be. Oh, how I hate and

despise such worldliness of spirit; such bowing

down to Mammon!"

"Yes," replied Blanche, "the worship paid to wealth is very sad: and yet, dear Harriet, improvident marriages entail so much misery, that, indeed, we must not be too severe upon those prudent individuals who endeavour to prevent them. To want money is in some respects, as injurious to the human heart as to possess too much of it. Besides, as love is usually supposed to evaporate as old Time steals on, it is, perhaps, as well that something solid should be left."

"Blanche, I declare you are nearly as mercenary as mama."

"Harriet, I know experimentally the miseries of poverty."

"The annoyances you mean."

"No. Annoyance is too mild a term. I have blushed for my father's niggardly economy. Does not that go beyond annoyance?"

"Perhaps. But, Blanche, let us set your father's parsimony against mama's worldliness, and see which way the balance lies. Remember, mama very nearly perilled my life. Now, Mr. Vavasour, whatever he may do, at any rate won't go the length of starving you to death."

"No. But indeed the love of money seems to increase so with papa, that I dare not calculate the consequences; nor to what length the miserable passion may not one day lead him."

"Nay," returned Harriet, "the worst of Mr. Vavasour's misdemeanors will be, that, if some man of fortune should take a fancy to you, he will try and make you marry him, whether he be, in other respects, a desirable parti or not. That, to be sure, would not be pleasant; but a

rery little politic management on your side, and you would, if I mistake not, easily evade the evil. You must insist on having an expensive trousseau; threaten him with all manner of extravagance; until, at last, you frighten him from his determination."

"Talking of men of fortune, Harriet;" said Blanche, with a little effort, "how will Edward .Vavasour bear your marriage with Mr. Greville?"

"Oh, he'll bear it well enough. Perhaps be very glad that henceforward he will be safe from mama's matrimonial toils."

"Mr. Vavasour appeared to me a very willing—what shall I call it?"

" Victim ?"

"Now, Harriet, don't affect to be modest.
Own that you think he loves you."

"Indeed, I shall own no such thing; for I am not in the habit of telling stories. Mr. Edward Vavasour does not care one straw for me."

Blanche started.

"No; not a single straw; nor I for him; at present, mark you: for I will confess, that had I seen more of Edward Vavasour, I might, perhaps, have been seduced from my loyalty to Sydney. You know, I was greatly taken with your cousin from the very first; and mams, aware of this, did everything she could (mama has really become a regular match-maker, lately) to bring about a marriage."

"Mr. Vavasour, surely, seconded your mother's wishes?"

"No, indeed, he did not. Mr. Vavasour came to this house when invited, just as he would have gone to any house, where he was certain of good society, and a tolerable dinner; and he conversed with me, precisely as he would have talked with any woman possessed of the average share of sense and wit. Whether, eventually, he would or would not have fulfilled mama's wishes, is now of little consequence. As it is more gratifying for my

amour propre to suppose he would, we will say, yes."

When returning to Marshampton, Blanche requested to be set down at Miss Bransby's.

"My dear Blanche," said Mrs. Brownlow, who was in the carriage, "I don't wish this engagement to be generally spoken of, just at present. The less such things are made the subjects of tittle tattle the better: but among friends, of course, it may be mentioned; to your father, or your aunt, there can be no objection to your naming it. Indeed, I wish the compliment to be paid to them. So, tell Miss Bransby, with my love, how happily settled my daughter is likely to be. I would be the bearer of the news myself, but it is late, and there are one or two places where I must absolutely call. Good bye, my dear. Your turn will come next -Yes, but it will. Good bye; good bye."

The reader will possibly call to mind, that Miss Bransby had, by some unknown means, "Yes, Ware you in organic?"

"Periodity. It is true, I am an apparent with their gentleman, therefore, periods by opinion deserves but little attention; but a far as I can judge from bearing, and from his public character, I believe Mr. Tousser is too sensible a man to force away his large ness, his domestic happiness, at least, sorry because his vanity may have been a little hart."

"And supposing his father greatly wished it; that he had set his heart on Edward's manyduty entertained in these days, that I can scarcely fancy Mr. Vavasour, or, indeed, Mr. anybody else, making so romantic, and I may add, unnecessary a sacrifice."

"You do not then believe that Edward Vavasour would marry a woman he did not really love?"

"Pardon me, Blanche, that is not my impression; on the contrary, I fear he might."

"He is not mercenary, Mrs. Turner."

"True. But is he not ambitious?"

"Yes, yes; I fear he is."

"Then, for ambition he will one day marry.

Good afternoon. My compliments to Mr.

Vavasour."

Blanche ran hastily up stairs; she threw her bonnet on the bed, and seating herself before the toilet-table, buried her face between her hands. She remained for some time entirely absorbed in thought; and when, at length, she raised her head there was a flash of almost wildness in her eye. From the moment of despatching her letter to Edward Vavasour, misgivings, both of the justice and the wisdom of the course she had adopted, crept into her mind; and now those doubts became most painful certainties. In refusing Edward Vavasour she had acted foolishly towards herself, and cruelly towards him. She had distressed a generous, noble minded man, whose love for her had been as pure ar it was disinterested. She had scorned and trampled on a princely heart which had been hers; hers only, and devotedly. She had requited love with coldness; tenderness with pride; and truth and loyalty with doubt.

But, if she had injured Edward, how infinitely more herself. For him there yet remained a thousand avenues to happiness. Fame, wealth, distinction, even love itself, were still awaiting him. The future, with its brilliant hopes, its animating prospects, might easily suffice to dim the past and drive the esent from his mind; while she, she had no

bright anticipations: all her life was spent.

Her future was a blank; her past, a melancholy dream. Her present, a moment of awakening even more agonising still. It seemed as though it were impossible for Blanche to love again, or hope again, or ever know, experimentally again, what buoyancy of heart and spirit meant.

Alas for Blanche! alas for any one who throws away a blessing, and when too late discovers the value and the price of the discarded treasure!

Blanche's efforts to recover her composure during that evening were ineffectual. Even her selfish, unobservant father remarked the deep dejection.

"Ah," he said, "you're out of spirits at the thoughts of losing Harriet Brownlow, I suppose. There will be an end to your intimacy. Can't expect the wife of a man of fortune, such fortune too as Mr. Greville's likely to inherit, to keep up much friendship

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with—with—the daughter of a poor country curate. Twenty thousand a year! What an income! I wish I had one tithe of it. Twenty thousand a year! The Newstoke Priors estate is not worth that; but whether it is or not, I shall never be a farthing the better for it."

"Sir William Greville has not twenty thousand a year; not above fifteen, I fancy."

"Well, fifteen. Fifteen thousand pounds a year are worth having; and Harriet Brownlow is a fortunate girl to have caught him; a montrous lucky girl, indeed."

"I believe, papa, that Mr. Greville is an amiable, sensible man in addition to his being a rich one."

"I don't know what to say about his being sensible. I understand that he's in debt, and gambles. Now, in my opinion, there's little sense in a man's contracting debts which there's no prospect of his ever paying; gambling debts, especially."

- "Are you well informed in this respect?

 Is it quite certain that Mr. Greville does gamble?
- " Your cousin, Edward Vavasour was my uth rity."
 - " Edward Vavasour?"
- "Yes. I forget how we came to speak of Greenile—probably in connexion with Miss Brownlow; but I remember perfectly his saying that he had a decided turn for gambling."
 - "Edward Vavasour knows Mr. Greville,
 - "I suppose so."
 - "And," pursued Blanche, mentally, "his opinion must surely be correct. It agrees, also, with Mrs. Brownlow's former judgment, passed before Mr. Greville's splendid prospects had dazzled and blinded her. Then should not Harriet be warned? Should not her eyes be opened to the risk she runs in marrying such a man. Surely.—But will she believe the representation? Attached as she is to Mr. Greville,

will Harriet credit a statement which lown him thus sailly? I fear not. Still the tril should be made." And full of real for Harriet happiness, Blanche resolved to impart the information she knew would be so unwelcome perhaps, discredited entirely.

On the morrow, however, her determination wavered: at all events, she deemed it advisable to consult Mrs. Turner as to the propriety of her interference.

"This is a sad history, indeed, Blanche."

Mrs. Turner answered, "and if well founded does, as you say, seriously threaten Miss Brownlow's happiness. But I would have you act warily. Your father may have been mistaken, or have exaggerated. Mr. Edward Vavasour's information may not be correct: besides, by quoting his authority, you risk bringing him, Mr. Edward Vavasour, I mean, into an unpleasant, even dangerous dilemma. And as Harriet Brownlow would not listen to her mother's representations, do you think that

would heed yours? Indeed, dear Blanche, my advice would be to let this matter take its course. Do not interfere in it. Miss Brownlow has abundance of relations and friends, let them watch over her impriness."

Blanche perfectly agreed with Mrs. Turner. From the moment there had appeared the lightest risk of sompromising Edward Versour's safety, she had decided upon remaining passive.

The marriage trotal phace. As Harrier has producted, it was accompanied with all the fear wealth, and flammer and good connection can bestow, but improaced to Mass Parasours trotance. True to be promise flammer trotal to Mr. Vavasour and with all accounts a Bandar but ineffectually. All Tarasours a management of the country of the former liberality man property a secretary of the former liberality man property.

wards a place where she would probably counter Edward Vavasour.

After the wedding, the happy couple space a few days at the Greville's family seat; the proceeded to the continent. And it was lee'er Blanche and Harriet met again.

CHAPTER XIV.

Nor many weeks after Harriet's wedding, Blanche was shocked, and her father astonished by the latter's receiving a summons to attend the death-bed of his relative, the owner of Newstoke Priors.

Mr. Vavasour, the communication stated, had been seized some months before with pulmonary disease, which a violent attack of cold had lately so much aggravated, that it was doubtful whether he would linger even until Mr. Frederic Vavasour's arrival, which he was requested to expedite as much as possible; for Edward, who had been apprised of his father's danger was not at home, nor was it known with entire certainty where a letter would overtake

him. He had left London during the Easter recess with the intention of paying a round divisits.

Mr. Vavasour set off, not altogether unitarian the had cherished when once before engage on an errand in nature somewhat similar while Blanche, who would joyfully have taken the station by the bedside of an individual, whose kindness towards her had naturally won her heart, could not forbear revolving in her mind the difference between her actual position, and that which it would have been, but for her unfortunate miscalculation.

Had it not been for her hapless misconstruction of Edward's feelings, she might have nursed her benefactor, have smoothed his passage to the tomb. Now, his door was shut against her; a barrier had been thrown across the very threshold; a barrier she herself had raised, yet never, never could displace. She thought of Edward's anguish, likewisc—the heavy grief he would experience on losing a parent to whom he had been so tenderly devoted. And who would soothe that harrowing sorrow? who proffer balm or consolation to his wounded heart? This might have been her blessed task; but all estranged as they were now, she dared not even speak of sympathy; she dared not tell him that she felt for him—that she could echo all his sighs—could shed a tear for each of his; for he would deprecate her sympathy, and fling her pity from him with disdain.

Mrs. Turner marked her young friend's unhappiness, but forebore to inquire the cause. In fact, although she knew not how the truth exactly stood, she had some suspicion of the nature of Blanche's grief; and believing she was a prey to disappointed affection, endeavoured to reconcile her mind to the trial, by dwelling on the uncertainty of all earthly hope, the instability of mortal happiness.

A very hackneyed theme; and one, which in

the present state of Blanche's feelings, was scarcely suitable; for bitter self-upbraiding might not be hushed with calculations such as these. And it was not her own lost happiness which Blanche was mourning over-it was the wound she had inflicted upon Edward. Again, when to illustrate and give tone to her argument, Mrs. Turner adverted to her own experience, Blanche could trace no parallel between the instances. What resemblance between Edward Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, and Mr. William Turner, son of the head partner in the firm of Turner, Smith, and Brassbones, Lombard Street, bankers? The cases were dissimilar; their citation, therefore, carried no conviction to our heroine's mind; and for the moral Mrs. Turner would have gathered, the lesson she was labouring to enforce-that, too. was lost upon Blanche. She could not raise her thoughts above this world, for here were her affections garnered. She might not dedicate her heart entirely to God, for in that heart, an earthly idol reigned supreme.

CHAPTER XV.

In the afternoon of a cold, wet, April day, Frederic Vavasour reached Newstoke Priors. His suffering relative was yet alive, but scarcely sensible; and although, at the entreaty of the attendants, (Edward Vavasour was not yet arrived) he entered the sick man's chamber, addressed the invalid, even took his clammy hand in his, his presence appeared to produce no effect upon the sufferer, excepting to increase his dying agony. Occasionally, he murmured Edward's name, then Blanche's. And once, making a violent effort, he breathed some incoherent phrases, amongst which, the words, "forgiveness," "injustice," "reparation," were alone intelligible. But it was

impossible to divine either the subject to which they stood in relation, or the speaker's object in uttering them.

And he lay there, in utter helplessness; the owner of that vast domain, the descendant of long ancestry, the possessor, during so many years, of wealth and power, and influence; for power and influence for aye attend the rich man's beck. In utter helplessness, and worse than helplessness, in mental anguish, with a dark secret pressing on his heart, bowing his spirit to the dust, and giving to the sting of death a sharper and more agonising pang.

Some of fair wisdom's lessons might have been imbibed in that melancholy chamber. What had gold done for Lionel Vavasour?—nothing. Through life he had been rich, yet scarcely happy. And, now, what now availed his wealth?—still, nothing. For the mighty one with whom he strove, tramples alike on all. The rich and poor, the little and the great, find equal justice at the hands of man's last

enemy. Death will accept no bribe. Golconda's diamond, Potosi's ore, account with him as the light dust upon the balance. Beauty and youth, high gifts and rare attainments, are as the vile and valueless with him.

Then, shall wealth purchase favour at his hands? Can gold avail to blunt the dart, or turn aside the stroke omnipotence itself directs?—Oh, no. Through life, gold is at once our slave and our ennobler; our means of happiness and bright enjoyment; the means, also, by which we often win the honour, and esteem, and praise of our compeers. But in the last dread struggle, gold is nought. The talisman has lost its power of enchantment. The once obedient slave deserts his former lord, and yields both services and influence to his approximate possessor.

Not for the rich will Death arrest his footsteps; not for the noble, will he stay his arm. It is only when the good man dies that Death comes stealthily, and strikes with such surpassing gentleness that the blow is scarcely felt; and whispering his solemn errand in tones of soft encouragement, becomes the messenger of peace, and confidence, and holy happiness; not of despair and frightful apprehension.

Death, to the righteous, is a blessing; the welcome summons to his father's mansion; his passport from a world of grief and desolution to a fair land where tears and sorrow are unknown.

Frederic Vavasour might have gleaned a wholesome lesson from his relative's last hours; but it was not so. Beyond the painful emotion all men experience on witnessing suffering, he felt nothing; and he was relieved when the dying man's increasing insensibility to all surrounding objects, rendered his presence in the room obviously useless.

Then succeeded speculations of a sordid nature.—Why had he been summoned to Lionel's death-bed? And what the amount of benefit he might possibly acquire by his decease? Of course the Will contained some clause in his favour; would that clause relate merely to church preferment, or to actual wealth; or would the bequest be to him or to Blanche?

Whilst thus speculating, Frederic Vavasour's mind misgave him; he feared, he greatly feared, his daughter rather than himself would prove the subject of his kinsman's favour. The very expression which had so frequently escaped his lips appeared to warrant this apprehension; for would there not be injustice in passing him over, and enriching Blanche?

Frederic forgot that Blanche had saved the old man's life; or, if he did remember the occurrence, it appeared as nothing when compared with the right he persuaded himself that he possessed upon his cousin's property. As Mr. Vavasour had a son, Frederic's wish was, perhaps, father to this imaginary right of his. Be that as it may, longing ardently to become

NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

erty, Frederic argued himself into the peron that he was entitled to that which he rnestly coveted.

s ruminations were broken by a summons
e dinner table, which he found laid in the
usually occupied by the owner of the
e when alone at Newstoke: the small, inenient chamber where Blanche had seen
relation for the last time; and when his
lar manner and discourse had so greatly
ed her.

sour had drawn his chair nearer to the she warmth of which was indeed grateful from whose flickering flame he sometimed his eyes towards the window. A cheer prospect lay without; the rain was fallingly; and occasionally a low gust of watover the vast building, or moaned amone afless boughs of trees whose gian aimed their great antiquity.

Suddenly the door of the apartment was brown back and a man entered. He was a perfect stranger to Frederic Vavasour; but he, it would appear, was not unknown to the new comer; since, advancing towards him with the ease of an old acquaintance, he extended him hand, exclaiming—

"Mr. Frederic Vavasour, glad to see you, Sir. Sorry, very sorry, I wasn't here when you arrived; but couldn't manage it. Business, very particular business. Hope, however, you've found all mings comfortable. And see old friend?—I'll trouble you for that deceme our old friend, Mr. Vavasour? I'm abaid it all up with him. However he's seen you, I had and I dare say has make seen you had know he was very amine as a clean heart; therefore it being sent for. Hope it all torily arranged between you.

I think I can guess, how: and I wish you joy, with all my heart; although I don't deny you're greatly injured. But still, as the saying is, what's done can't be undone; and it might have been worse. So here's to Miss Vansour's happiness; a very pretty girl she is, and deserves a good husband, as I hope Edward Vavasour will be. He is reckoned a fine young man by some people; can't say I like him much; but if your daughter does, why that's enough, you know. Then again, I say, here's to her health and happiness."

"Miss Vavasour is much obliged to you," returned Frederic, stiffly.

"Not at all, my good Sir: not in the least degree. I had nothing to do with that; it was the old gentleman's own fancy; entirely his own whim to marry the young people. No, no—I didn't advise that. All I advised was, that he should tell you everything about Mrs. Edward Vavasour (she was his old love, you know; Frederica Markham, the daughter of the m dese end all that business at Lavon, per your directments before he tied; as an a minute in alter the Will, it make the in the our: it descrip that which he has a

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"Sir," interposed Frederic, with a touch of stateliness; "I have not the advantage of knowing even your name. May I ask it? And further, may I inquire in what relation you stand to our family? For, suffer me to observe, that the language you have just made use of, in allusion to the owner of this house, demands some explanation; which I, as his nearest relation here, shall most assuredly require from you."

"Name, Sir; name, Sir; my name is Tomlinson. I'm neither ashamed of it, nor of what I was formerly: and as for the expressions you find fault with, why I can tell you, that if you knew everything, and how shamefully you've been supplanted, you'd be the last man in England to quarrel with them."

"Supplanted? I have been supplanted? By whom, pray, and how? Nay," continued Frederic, perceiving that Tomlinson had suddenly assumed the demeanour of entire reserve, "concealment is no longer possible; you have said too much to admit of further

now. Where have I been supplanted, and by whom?

But this passionate appeal produced no further effect on Tomlinson, than to increase his apparent determination of preserving silence.

"Again," cried Vavasour, impatiently, "I ask the meaning of those mysterious words: expressions which appear to reflect so fearfully both on my cousin's honour and his justice?"

"If he didn't reckon the disclosure necessary-"

"He did desire to make some explanation; you, yourself, have told me that he did. I was summoned to Newstoke for that very purpose; and I should have learnt the whole truth from his own lips had sufficient strength and consciousness remained when I arrived. But I was too late. On you, therefore, this duty obviously devolves; since you, it seems, are pessessed of this secret."

"If I told you, it would be of very little good; Mr. Vavasour has left a Will, depend upon it; so you'll be cut out, at any rate."

"'Mr. Vavasour has left a Will. You'll be cut out," said Frederic in a musing tone of voice. "What in the name of all that's secred do you mean?" and the speaker looked anxiously at his companion.

Tomlinson whistled, and turned his had aside. Then, after throwing a glance replete with meaning upon Frederic, he cast his eye upon the picture hanging over the mantlepiece, and nodding significantly, said—

"She was his early love, you know."

"Well, what of that?"

"Only, that Mr. Edward Vavasour, he who'll get Newstoke Priors now, was her son. At least, so people said. But I know nothing of it."

A light broke suddenly on Frederic's mind: a suspicion that Edward was not by right his cousin's heir. Tomlinson divined his thoughts.

"No, not exactly that. You're not right

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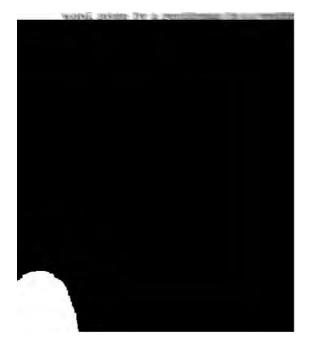
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right to demand your confidence. And me, Mr. Tomlinson, believe me, me the of a gentleman, that were me me with me. I give you my second word disclosure that you may make simI in modate. Without your members in Michaele arrests and splanes at a Michaele arrests are splanes at a Michaele arrests are splanes at a michaele war, should are message and the models. There a me and make the models.



perty. It's a fine estate, Sir; with good management worth sixteen thousand a-year. Well, I say, I only wish you were to be our neighbour here instead of Edward Vavasour, whom I always hated—always, from a boy; and with good reason, too," and in moody silence, Tomlinson ran over in his mind the various slights and indignities he had received from Edward.

"What relation is this Edward Vavasour to my cousin?" asked Frederic.

"None in the world," returned Tomlinson,
frow off his guard by the abrupt inquiry.

At least, he can scarcely be called a relation.

is father's name was Vavasour, certainly;

ut he_"

"I see—I see," cried Frederic, eagerly; "I see the whole. Edward is the child of that woman, and adopted—"

"Yes, Sir, you have it. Edward Vavasour was her child, and my old master, Mr. Vava-sour (I lived with him as valet then) like a poor fool, adopted him."

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"And brought him forward as his son to detriment of me and mine," muttered Fre ric, in that under tone which denotes the tensity of rage. "The scoundrel; it is whe did not crave my forgiveness; for exupon his death-bed I would not have grant it."

"Well, that is carrying matters to a gollength," said Tomlinson, throwing off anoth glass of wine; although it was evident head was suffering from that he had alread rank. "At the same time it certainly is a wugly business, and very aggravating to think the you should be cut out in this way, and all it a stranger. But if it should happen the there's no will, or one that wouldn't hold go in a court of law, why you know, Mr. Vay sour, you may make good your claim. It ready to come forward any day, and so woo Mrs. Tomlinson; there's nothing I would do to serve a friend." Frederic Vayasour etended his hand to Mr. Tomlinson, where the said to the said

presped it with extreme translater and position I like a gentleman; zni vo z gentlema Mr. Veresour. Not the the Street Vavasour is the same to a total at the last la father was a carrier in the gra a member of the farmer and an leng at the top of the tree of the late FIET I call gentient FR AT I DAE JULE 1 : 🚾 1 <u>* ()</u> 25 () 25 () The same of the sa Figure Ell Colleges (2000) 🗺 . 🕶 Line Silver Silver · - <u>1</u>- - - -The second of the second of 22

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Tomlinson, observing that his companion bash his hand upon the bell-string.

But Vavasour, suspecting that Mr. Tomlinson's libations had been very instrumental inpromoting that worthy's present confidential frame of mind rang and ordered a fresh supply of vine: and Mr. Tomlinson, notwithstanding his protestations, readily suffered his glass to be replenished; and with equal willingness drank distributions.

"Why, Sir, you see, the fact was this," he said, in answer to another appeal from Frederic.
"The fact was this. Mr. Lionel Vavasor wanted to marry Miss Markham; his father wouldn't hear of it; wished him to many Lady Wilhelmina Crowder, a rich heiress. At last the lady, Miss Markham I mean, thinking I suppose, that she'd no chance of getting Mr. — Ir. Lionel. took up with Captain Vavasor, — Ir. a sort of distant relation, who used to be good deal at Newstoke. Indeed, I believe — I good deal at Newstoke. Indeed, I believe — I said the said of the said to be a good deal at Newstoke. Indeed, I believe — I said the said to be a good deal at Newstoke. Indeed, I believe — I said the said to be a said to

pointment. He would have done better to he married; as I remember saying at the time However, he chose to travel; and we wentwas his confidential servant then-we went Spain. It was during the time of war, you know, and people couldn't run from one end a the continent to the other as they do now; = but were forced to go just to those places is was friendly to us. So we went to Lisbon, and afterwards to Cadiz and Malta; but we never staid long anywhere; my master was too restless and unhappy. At last, we came back to Lisbon, and there he was ill, had # bad fever; and when he got better, instead of sailing straight for England as he had intended, he took a villa out at Cintra, and toles me, he should spend another year abroad. didn't care much about it. Lisbon wa lively enough with the military, and I made acquaintance with some of the donzellas; for you'll not suppose I'd been so long abroau and hadn't picked up enough of their language

make myself understood. They're not retty, though, the Portuguese women; at ast, not to be compared with their neighbours, the Spanish ladies; those are women to turn a young man's head."

Frederic Vavasour made a movement of impatience; which his companion observing, he once more resumed the thread of his narrative.

"There was, however, amongst my acquaintance, one very pretty little Portuguese girl; I say acquaintance, for although we'd never spoken, and only met in the streets, we knew each other well enough by sight. I was a good looking fellow then, Mr. Vavasour."

Frederic, withdrawing the decanters to his side of the table. "But it is growing late, and if Mr. Edward Vavasour should reach this before you have given me the information I so earnestly desire, we may not find another opportunity."

"True. Well, this little donz one day beckoned me to follow her.

"Which, of course, you did."

"Yes, Sir: I followed her into outskirts of the city; for, you see before we had removed to Cintra; ugly, cut-throat looking place it was saw: and, although I've as much p as most men, I must confess, I gether like going. But I soon for was nothing to be afraid of; for our English servant maid, a neat, tidy lo

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letter or jewel-case; nor didn't, for ever 5.1 many years after."

- "But you think ——? Oh, of course, be had read the letter."
- "Yes, yes, he'd read it; and he was ground quite another sort of man: not angry, but happy."
 - " Did he reply?"
- "Not by letter; that very evening, when was quite dark, he desired me to point out the way to the place where I had been."
 - "Which, of course, you did?"
- "Not entirely. We had not gone man steps, when who should we meet but the prett señora who had first enticed me; she appeared to guess our errand, for she tripped up to me, and asked quite loud where I was going and my master, who was walking close beside heard what she said, and answered for me."
- "And she became his guide instead == you?"
 - "Yes; and I wasn't sorry, to confess &=

truth; for I wasn't altogether clear of the right road. So on they went together, and I came home, wondering what this would all lead to: and whether I should get my dollars or not. I should have liked, too, to have heard more about it; for it was a strange romantic piece of business, and I sometimes fancied no good would come of it."

"And you were right, it seems," muttered Vavasour.

"Yes, Sir. But it wasn't the sort of mischief I had fancied. I thought some beautiful young lady had fallen in love with Mr. Vavasour; not that it was his old flame, Miss Markham, a dying."

"Then it was she who sent the letters and the jewel-case?"

Yes; so I found out afterwards. At the time I could learn nothing; although I warrant I ke Dt a sharp look out. But there was nothing but silence and mystification. My master going out in the dark, and coming back all out

of sorts and miserable. And even after we went to Cintra, it was just the same; until, at last, one day he came in looking worse than ever, and, after a little hesitation, told me we were to have an addition to the family; and, sure enough, the next day, back he brings Master Edward and his nurse, the pretty English waiting-woman, who gave me the things. After she came, I wasn't much longer in the dark. It seems, Mrs. Vavasour, Miss Markham as was, had followed her husband everywhere (he was on service) but her health wouldn't bear the racketting about : besides. he used her ill, and at last he went off with his regiment, and left her on a sick bed, without the common necessaries of life; and then it was that she applied to Mr. Vavasour; as much, I believe, out of hatred to her own husband as any thing else-for he treated her like a brute, and the child too. Well, she found she was dving, and she couldn't bear the thoughts of her child's being left in the hands of such a

ruffian; so she wasn't easy till she made my master promise that he would be a father to him." An expression of vehement resentment burst from Mr. Vavasour. "Yes; I don't wonder you're indignant at such knavery."

"And weakness. After all Miss Markham's treachery and inconstancy, how could Mr. Vavasour suffer himself to be cajoled in the manner you describe, and by the very woman who had jilted him?"

"That's just what I said to Sarah Lumley; and her answer was: 'Why, Mr. Tomlinson, I do believe that the worse we women behave to you, the better you esteem us.' Ha! ha! That was Sarah's reasoning, and she's a shrewd body. Sarah is Mrs. Tomlinson now; a very clever, charming person, I assure you, Mr. Vavasour; and uncommonly well-looking for her years. Nobody would guess her age at more than forty. But ladies don't like their ages to be talked about; so I must'nt peach. Ha! ha!"

"Do you suppose, Mr. Tomlinson, that Mr. Vavasour always intended to palm off this boy upon the family as his own? or that the falsehood was the fruit of after circumstances?"

"Oh, you're a knowing one! you'd not be easily hoodwinked, I take it."

"I asked that question, because I now remember, that when I saw Mr. Lionel Vavasour after his father's death, and made my first acquaintance with that impostor, I was struck by my cousin's backwardness to speak of his marriage; and—"

"Marriage!—how could he talk about his marriage, when there's none to talk about? However, as far as you're concerned, it's every bit as bad as if there had been. At first, Mr. Vavasour did not, sure enough, call this boy his own; and very likely he did not then intend to practise any deception. But, you know, my dear friend, that when once we begin any thing, no matter what, there's no

telling where it will end. By degrees, he got fond of the young chap; he had nothing else to care about; he got fond of him, I say; and, at last, he told my wife and me (we were married by that time) that he had adopted Master Edward; in short, that he was as good to him as his own child, and wished it never to be mentioned that he was not."

"And coupled this intimation of his wishes with a —" bribe, Vavasour would have said, had he not feared offending his respectable companion.

Wered. "Why, yes; Mr. Vavasour was liberal enough, both to my wife and me; and always has been, that I must say; but he never offered to buy our secrecy. No, no: he knew we were above such dirty work as bribery."

"Did it never occur to my cousin that he was committing an act of gross injustice?"

"Can't say, indeed. Perhaps it did. Mr.

Vavasour used to be very odd about that young man: so capricious; one minute a soft fond of him as possible, the next, not seeming to care two straws about him. I used to thin it jealousy; but, may be, his conscience twinged him. However, one thing is certain that after his meeting your daughter, he was a latered man. Terribly cut up—terribly cut up indeed, my master was. Seemed almost fancy it a sort of warning. It was curious certainly, that they should meet in that of way, as if it was on purpose for her to saw his life. I reckon, he hadn't many easy hou afterwards."

" Is Edward's father living?"

"No, he died before we came to England

"Then, what witnesses are there to the truth of all this statement? I don't dou by your word, Mr. Tomlinson, not I. I know you to be a gentlemanlike, honourable man. I at just supposing for the sake of argument,

this matter were brought before a court of justice, would there be no further evidence against Edward's claim than yours, Mr. Tomlinson?"

"There couldn't be better, Sir; for Mrs. Tomlinson was present at his birth. We've got testimonials also; one a very important one, for it's part of the letter Mrs. Vavasour wrote my master. Somehow, or other, it got tom, and I found half of it lying on the ground one day, when he'd been turning over some old papers and things, here in this very room."

"How could we prove that it is her handwriting?"

"Oh, that's easy enough. Any of the Markhams would do that; and there are plenty of them in this neighbourhood."

" Have they no suspicion?"

"None that I know of. But they know that Mrs. Vavasour had a child; and though they think it fell into its father's hands, and died abroad, that's only supposition, and they would be ready enough to acknowledge him. Besides, he's the very image of his mother.

There that picture, don't you see the likeness!

Dark eyes, high nose, and coal black hair.

Why, bless your heart, he's no more like Mr.

Lionel Vavasour than I am. But, after all, where would be the use of bringing the matter before a court of justice; the Vavasour property is not entailed, and of course it's all willed to him?"

- "You are sure there is a Will?"
- "It's most likely that there is."
- "Certainly. Yes, yes; undoubtedly there is. Under such circumstances, Mr. Vavasour would assuredly have taken every means to secure the property to his favourite. Wills, however, are not always valid."
- "Very true, Mr. Vavasour, very true. Wills are not always what they ought to be. And, now, supposing the one we are talking about should happen to be imperfect, what would you do? Contest it?"
- "That would I; were it only from the spirit of revenge!"
 - "You've been unhandsomely dealt with,

that there's no denying; very unhandsomely, indeed."

- We shall know soon," said Frederic, almost as if speaking to himself.
- I take it, you might know this very hour, if ou chose. At any rate, you might know whether there is a Will or not; and it would be something to be sure of that; for if there shouldn't be a Will, your way is clear enough."
 - "How could I ascertain the positive existence of a Will?"
 - "The easiest thing in life. You see, Mr. Vavasour was always rather odd in his ways; very careless about every thing; wouldn't believe there is such a thing as a curious, prying person to be met with; nor a dishonest one; never suspected any body. It's amazing how easy he was to dupe. Sometimes, by way of joke, I've told him the most unlikely stories in the world;—and he believed every word, as if it had been gospel."

"What has all this to do with the Will?"

"Why, not much, certainly. But, as I remarked just now, master was quite unsuspecting. I've known him leave money, valuables, and all sorts of things in an open drawer, and then forget all about it."

" His Will among the rest?"

"Not quite so bad as that. What, however, he didn't leave about, he used to put into that Japan chest you see yonder; and half his time, even that would be left unlocked: and if it wasn't, it was very nearly all alike; for the lock's not worth a brass farthing; any key will open it. And, I must say, that all things considered, there wouldn't be any great harm in—in—at least, it's no more than most men who have been used as shamefully as you, would make no bones of doing. I'm sure, I shouldn't for one."

In place of answering, Mr. Vavasour threw his eyes upon the ground, and kept them there. He was anxious to avoid his companion's glance. It might be imagination, but he could not forbear suspecting, that Tomlinson's words pointed at something more than merely ascertaining the existence of a Will; or even the provisions such a document might happen to contain.

- "Just think," continued Tomlinson, "how easy you might do it: the commonest key in the world—even a rusty nail."
- "No, no;" cried Vavasour, "I will do nothing so dishonourable. Why should I compromise myself, when a few hours must settle every thing. My cousin can't live long."
- "I suppose you will contest the property if the Will should be invalid?"
- "Yes: most assuredly I shall: and you, Mr. Tomlinson, I hope, will stand my friend?"
 - "Trust me, my good fellow !"
 - " I may count upon your friendly offices?"
 - "You'll find me as true as steel. Edward Vavasour is my aversion: and you've no great reason to like him either, I can tell you."
 - "I have not, indeed."

"Tisn't on account of that, I mean; 'tisn't on account of his getting the Newstoke property instead of you. But, if it hadn't been for him, you would have been rector of Newstoke. Aye, indeed, Sir. About five years ago, the incumbent died, and Mr. Vavasour talked of appointing you; but Mr. Edward, he wanted the living for a friend of his own; and got it too."

Frederic set his teeth firmly.

"I don't wonder you're angry; 'tis enough to vex any man."

"Mr. Edward Vavasour is come," said the butler, entering the room.

Frederic rose from his seat, and proceeded slowly to meet his rival. Edward scarcely noticed him. Beside himself with grief, he rushed to the bedside of the man who had been to him a father; and Frederic followed.

Mr. Vavasour was in the very agonies of death; he appeared, however, to recognise his adopted son; for, on his approach, the sick man's countenance, darkened by suffering and the sense of guilt, became yet darker; his eyes glared horribly, his hands were clenched, his lips compressed, his frame distorted, till suddenly, making a convulsive movement, he raised himself, and extending both his arms, shrieked:—"Frederica!"

The scene was of so appalling a description, that amongst those who witnessed it, none, excepting Edward and the sick-nurses, possessed either sufficient fortitude or interest to remain. The others, overcome with terror, fled from the ghastly spectacle.

CHAPTER XVI.

FREDERIC found himself once more in the study, and alone; in that solitude, which is the nurse of so much that is noble, virtuous and good; so much, likewise, that is vile, and mean, and criminal. Little recked he of the anguish of the dying man. His mind was full of the injustice he had suffered. He thought of the broad acres he had lost; of the rich rental; of the hoarded gold. And he counted the chance—the slender chance which yet remained for him.

Slender as that chance was, he pondered over it until the possibility grew to be hope, and hope certainty. Either there would be no Will, or that Will an imperfect one. And as he mused, his glance aye rested on the chest where this important document, if such a document existed, lay.

Twice Frederic Vavasour advanced towards that chest; and twice, as if a better feeling mastered him, he turned away. The third time, he approached the cabinet, and passing his hand over it, found that the hinges were secure; the lock, although as Tomlinson averred, one of the commonest description, fast.

Vavasour crossed the room. He stirred the fire. Over the mantel-piece was hanging Frederica's picture; and as it caught his eye, the blood rushed to his cheek and brow. He turned away; and the cabinet came full in view. He walked over to the window, and drawing back the curtain, looked out, as if to ascertain the state of the weather. The clouds had separated, the moon had risen in her full brightness, and her rays shewed wood and water, glade and dell, which had been his by right.

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He turned once more, again his eye fell on the fatal chest.

"A common key would open it.—Hist—what is that? A groan?"

He unfastened the door of the room and looked carefully up and down the long, dimly lighted passage. His eye caught nothing; nor at first his ear, although he listened anxiously: all was unbroken stillness. For a short time at least, and then he heard again the hollow moan; while a cold, clammy substance touched his hand causing his flesh to creep, his hair to stiffen.

Hastily re-entering the room, Vavasour would have closed the door, but it resisted his endeavour; and still more bewildered, and panic striken, he retreated to the centre of the chamber, where, with breathless carnestness, he stood watching the door. It opened slowly; and Frederic, at once, discovered the cause of his alarm, and smiled at the cowardize he had recently displayed. A large setter dog

pushed his way into the apartment, and after snuffing in every direction, stopped in front of Vavasour; then, uttering another low and piteous moan, fastened his almost speaking eyes wistfully on him. Vavasour caressed the sagacious animal: he gladly welcomed any object which might divert his mind from the supposed contents of the Indian cabinet.

The dog was, however, restless; a favourite of the dying Mr. Vavasour, he had sought him in his accustomed place, and disappointed in the object of his pursuit, after a few minutes of uneasy quiet, the faithful animal rose and slunk out of the room. Again was Vavasour alone.

There have been seasons when the best have fallen from their integrity; when the strong have become feeble, and wise men fools. Frederic Vavasour was neither good, nor strong, nor even sensible; and he was assailed by powerful temptation—temptation

which his besetting sin too easily responto, while an unhappy train of circumstan fearfully increased the perils which s rounded him. He believed himself injurand the power of revenge lay, it appear within his grasp;—gold had long been worshipped Deity; and countless riches migbe his.

It is true, that honour might have hinder or prudence warned, or principle restraine but the sordid miser, whose soul is sullied we the lust of gold, what can he know of honour bright requirements? Even the sense of shat has passed from his low, grovelling spirit: a when great secular advantages appear with their power of possession, men do not, usual too nicely scrutinize the means they madopt to gain the glittering prize; nor do the always wisely calculate the risk they madour.

Vavasour drew out a bunch of keys hew in the habit of carrying about him; and at carefully inspecting each, laid them upon the table. Then, crossing the threshold of the room, again he threw a keen, inquiring glance along the corridor; again, he listened eagerly; and, hearing nothing, returned and closed the door with stealthy caution.

* * * * * *

"It's all over," cried Tomlinson, bursting into the room; "its all over. Lionel Vavasour's gone to his last account. Whew—what's this smell of burning? Not the house on fire, surely?"

Frederic pointed to some scraps of writing paper lying beneath the grate. "I have been making calculations on the cover of an old letter which did not satisfy me; in fact, my head was full of other things. I tore up the paper and threw it into the fire. And, so, Mr. Vavasour is released?"

[&]quot;Yes," said Tomlinson: "but Edward-

upon my life, I couldn't help feeling for him."

"What of him?"

"A fit, Sir; fainted dead, carried off insensible; ought to be bled, but that fool of an apothecary doesn't like the responsibility; for, you see, they've tried both arms, and can't get a drop of blood. Now, it's my opinion, Mr. Vavasour, the temporal artery must be opened, or his life's not worth the snuff of a candle, as I told the surgeon. But he's timid, and says he must speak to you first: and so I said I would come and let you know."

" Where is Edward?"

"In the room next his father: they couldn't get him any farther; he's as heavy as a stone. Oh, here's Mrs. Vyse, looking about for you, I calculate."

"If you please, Sir, to step this way," said the housekeeper; "I'm afraid my poor young master's very dangerously ill." And most unwillingly, Frederic followed her.

"Pray, Mr. Vavasour," asked Tomlinson, on the following morning, "are these keys yours?"

Frederic looked at the keys.

- "Yes, indeed, they are; where did you find them?"
- "I picked them up, Sir; picked them up off the floor,"
- "In Mr. Vavasour's room, I suppose: dropped in the confusion, probably."
- "Why, no, it wasn't there I found them. It was in the study; close to the Indian cabinet."
- "Indeed!" Frederic answered, carelessly.

 "It doesn't much matter, however, where my keys were found; I'm glad to have them safe again. There's nothing more inconvenient than to lose one's keys; and I remember, now, I heard something jingle as I followed

Mrs. Vyse out of the room; I suppose that was my keys."

"Humph," said Tomlinson; "perhaps it was. Only," he added with much meaning. "the Indian cabinet doesn't stand in the way out of the room."

Frederic turned hastily away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE severe remedy finally adopted succeeded in restoring Edward's consciousness; but entirely prostrated both in mind and body, he confined himself closely to his room.

Two days after the old man's death, Frederic was summoned thither.

"Be kind enough," said Edward, tendering him a bunch of keys, "be kind enough to search amongst my father's papers for the Will. I am unequal to the task; and as you are, probably, one of the executors, I trust you will relieve me from the distressing duty."

"May it not be delayed for a few days, until you, yourself, are able to examine Mr. Vavasour's papers?" "No; my poor father may have left directions respecting his—his—funeral; and, therefore, it is expedient to open the Will without any further loss of time. You will find it, I apprehend, in the old Indian cabinet which stands in the study."

"I should be glad," said Mr. Vavasour, in a hesitating tone, "of a coadjutor; I am so utterly unused to this sort of thing, that really I fear I shall prove myself very inefficient. Who knew your father's habits?"

"No one," answered Edward, drily.

"Then, if I am likely to be one executor, who, do you suppose, will be the others?"

"Revely—Mr. Revely, of Coningsby, I think I have heard my poor father mention as the man he should probably select."

"Then I may write and ask that gentleman's assistance?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But Revely is no better advised in this matter than yourself. That fellow, Tomlinson, is the only man who at all understood my father's habits, and he might be useful; but he's a low scoundrel, whom no gentleman would choose to associate with."

"In an emergency like the present, we must not be over nice."

"Well, well; do as you will. Write to Revely, send for Tomlinson; only let the Will be found and acted on," said Edward, impatiently; and Frederic withdrew.

A few hours afterwards, both his coadjutors arrived at Newstoke. In their presence, he unlocked the chest, and carefully examined its contents. Bank notes to the amount of upwards of a thousand pounds were there, and jewellery, and papers, some of high importance, others valueless. But no Will!

"Very extraordinary," said Mr. Revely, turning over a bundle of letters tied together with black ribbon, and on one of which was written the direction, that all should be committed, unread, to the flames. "It's very singular my old friend should not have left his Will where it could be easily got at."

" Perhaps, there's none," Tomlinson observed gruffly.

"None!" answered Vavasour. "Oh, yes; there's a Will, depend upon it."

"Let us search the drawers of that writing table."

"There's nothing there. Mr. Vavasour kept all his papers of importance in yonder chest. Pve been acquainted with him for more than thirty years; and I never knew him put the value of a sixpence in any other place."

"We must examine that writing table, at any rate."

The writing table was examined. Every drawer was ransacked; still, no Will was found. They proceeded then to investigate the furniture in other parts of the house. Not a hole, not a cranny, not a chest, not a drawer, but underwent a close inspection; and the result was yet the same. No Will could be discovered. "There must be a Will somewhere," Mr. Revely observed, at length. "Who was my poor friend's man of business?"

"Faith, that's not very easy to say. He used to employ Racker and Wingley, over at Darsfoot; a couple of as arrant rascals as ever lived: did me out of fifty pounds. At last they smashed. Racker blew his brains out, and Wingley vanished; went off to America, I believe, the scoundrel. And since that, I don't think Mr. Vavasour employed any man of business, at least not regularly."

"Well, all we can do, is to report to Edward Vavasour: and he, I suppose, will take the necessary steps for ascertaining whether such a document exists or not."

"There must be a Will somewhere," Frederic said with considerable emphasis.

"I don't see the actual necessity for it. Certainly, it seems very unlikely, that the owner of a property such as this, should die intestate; very. At the same time, more entraordinary things have happened. People are so dilatory; so apt to procrastinate: and as my poor friend had but one son, who is his natural heir," (a low whistle from Tomlinson caught Vavasour's ear) "perhaps he considered the duty less important than other men have done. Can I be of any further service?"

"None; unless, indeed, you would inform Edward Vavasour of our fruitless search."

"Nay, my dear Sir, the communication will surely come better from you. I am, comparatively, a stranger to Mr. Edward Vavasour."

"True; but my cousin is in a state of such mental suffering, appears so entirely overwhelmed and paralyzed by his loss, that I really think your seeing him would be an advantage, by forcing him to rouse himself."

"Poor fellow; is he indeed?" said the kind hearted Revely. "Well, if you really think my going to him will be of service, I'm sure I am ready to do that, or anything you judge expedient."

They shook hands, and Revely departed on his errand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VAVASOUR flung himself into a chair and gasped for breath. His countenance was livid; he wore, in fact, the aspect of a man who has just made a most painful effort to control himself; and whose exhausted energies were now completely paralyzed. Had the necessity for circumspection lasted longer, he could not have endured the trial;—must have betrayed himself.

He bore the semblance, also, of one who is irresolute: who would advance, yet dared not; who would retreat, yet was no longer master of his steps. Plunged in uneasy reverie he sat with his eyes fastened on the ground, his lips drawn back, his hands clasping each other

with convulsive force, and the big, clammy drops standing thick upon his forehead.

A chuckling laugh was heard. Vavasour started: the intonation sounded like a demoniac evidence of mirthful triumph. He shuddered; and looking up, his glance encountered that of Tomlinson, whose presence he had overlooked. The expression now cast on Varasour was full of scrutiny and cunning, mingled with self-congratulation.

"Well, Mr. Vavasour, this is a fine thing for you; I congratulate you, Sir."

An exclamation of extreme annoyance escaped from Vavasour, but without regarding it, Tomlinson continued—

"There will be some trouble in making out your claim; and you'll want money—no going to law without money—but the Newstoke extate is worth fighting for; and as for the case.

—why, I don't know that I should mind account it, myself. As there's no Will, or course, you mean to try your chance."

- Fm not certain that there is no Will."

"I am, then. I know that there is none; and such being the case, as heir-at-law, you can't do otherwise than lay claim to the property. You must have money; but, as I said before, I am willing to accommodate you; for I happen to have a snug little sum which would be just the thing. Now, what would you give me for the accommodation?"

"The money belongs to you; the terms on which you lend it must also come from you."

"Yes; but say something. You know, I can't afford to lose the use of that five thousand pounds; and I should expect some acknowledgment for the accommodation."

"Of course. But you must state exactly, what."

Well, then, what do you say to thistwenty thousand pounds when the law suit is decided; and seven and a-half per cent interest mean time." The enormity of the demand startled Vava-

"I thank you, Mr. Tomlinson, but the terms you offer are out of the question. I must look elsewhere for assistance. Besides, I really have very little idea of contesting the property."

"Then you're not the man of spirit I took you for. Why, Sir, the Newstoke estate is worth a clear fifteen thousand a-year. Think of that, Mr. Vavasour."

"Aye, Mr. Tomlinson; but supposing after I had spent, I know not what, in establishing my claim, a Will should turn up."

"There's none to turn up. There was a Will, as I've good reason to know, for I was one of the witnesses; Racker, the attorney, who blew out his rascally brains, the other—"

For a few seconds Vavasour did not reply; at length, he asked in a voice he vainly endeavoured to steady—

"Have you any notion what became of that document?"

"A very good one. After being duly signed and sealed, it was placed in that Indian cabinet, where I saw it only the day before the old man died."

"Then we must have overlooked it."

"No, Sir, it was not overlooked; but—"
Tomlinson drew close to Vavasour, and hoarsely
whispered in his ear—"there was a smell of
burning in this room the night my master
died."

"True; and I explained the cause," Vavasour answered; still endeavouring to appear calm; but his voice trembled, his lip quivered, and his cheek was cadaverous.

Neither spoke again for some seconds.

"Harkye," said Tomlinson, at length, "harkye, Mr. Vavasour. It's no use trying to bamboozle me. I'm not easily hoodwinked, nor gagged neither." The last words were spoken with peculiar emphasis. "You can't bamboozle me, I say; and so we'd better understand each other at once. You're in my ower, Mr. Frederic Vavasour. Nay, never ince man; I won't harm you. You did no ore than, in your place, many other men buld have done. Besides, I like pluck; and u shewed it, Mr. Vavasour, when you put a hangman's cord about your neck."

"Mr. Tomlinson," said Vavasour, haughtily, his companion's insolence roused all the arman blood. "Mr. Tomlinson, your lanage is offensive to the last degree. What you mean by this insolent insinuance?"

Tomlinson laughed, scoffingly.

- "How dare you insinuate that I destroyed to Will? Are you aware of the seriousness of the charge?"
- "To be sure I am. I know as well as you do, that destroying a Will is a hanging matter."
 - "And you have the effrontery to accuse me of a crime of such magnitude, simply, because I chanced to throw part of an old letter be-

neath the grate? You must be either drule or mad!"

"Not I. I'm neither drunk nor crazy; know well enough what I am about: an once more, I tell you, Mr. Vavasour, that burning your cousin's Will, you ran a chan of wearing a hempen necklace one day other. A word from me, and you wou swing."

"You lie, Mr. Tomlinson!" cried Vavasour, starting up. "I destroyed no Will!"

"What do you say to these?" said Tomlinson, quietly taking from his pocket-book some fragments of paper, the edges of which bore marks of burning.

" I know nothing about them."

"Then I've the advantage over you; and I know, too, that this little scrap of paper would settle your business, Mr. Frederic Vavasour. I tell you what, Sir, the next time you destroy a Will, do it completely. Burn every atom. Don't go like a fool, and leave enough

to prove both that there was a Will, and that you did your best to get rid of it. You should have torn the paper into smaller pieces, Sir.3"

Frederic, almost fainting from shame and vexation, sunk into a chair. Tomlinson walked to the other end of the room, where stood a table bearing refreshments, and filling a tumbler with wine and water, presented it to him; and Frederic, fevered by the agitation of his mind, did not refuse the draught; although the hand which offered it, seemed to him that of an arch-fiend.

rage; take heart; and all will turn out well:
although this is a very ugly job, there's no denying it. But you're safe, Mr. Vavasour;
safe with me. William Tomlinson's not the
man to betray a friend. Besides, as I said
before, I hate that popinjay, up-stairs, and
would gladly strain a point or two to see him
sent about his business. It's no more than he

would have done by me. And, now, about this money—about this money? Eight and a half per cent;" the crafty Tomlinson had already raised his price; "eight and a half per cent, and twenty thousand when the matter's settled, and it's yours."

"I shall do nothing further in this business," said Frederic, in a sickened tone.

"Pooh, man; you must, you must. You've gone too far to stop."

"Would I had never touched that accursed Will!"

"Why, what a fool you are! The game is in your hands. Will you throw away your chance? Look out, Sir, look out; see what a property it is; clear fifteen thousand a-year; and might be made to bring in more: and it is yours, it must be yours; and all for a triffing sacrifice!" Then, as Frederic still appeared in resolute, Tomlinson added, almost menacingly: "What if I should feel it my duty to acquaint my late master's adopted son with this little

job of your performing-eh, Mr. Vavasour, how would you feel then?"

- "You would gain nothing by the disclosure."
- "I don't know. Information's always worth its price; and one good turn deserves another."
- " Men do not give much for gratitude's sake, Mr. Tomlinson."
- "Not as much as for interest. But for all that, if you're spooney enough to bolt, it will be worth my while to try and make something out of him."
 - "What are the conditions of the loan?"
 Tomlinson repeated them.
 - "Mr. Tomlinson," said Vavasour, after a brief consideration, "I cannot consent. Those terms are infinitely too exorbitant."
 - "Then, what would you agree to?"
 - "If the law-suit terminates at the end, or before the end of the first year, I will give you fifteen thousand pounds; if at the end of two, twelve; of three, nine; and so on. The five

thousand pounds you advance, meanwhile, bearing the highest legal rate of interest; I believe,
five per cent. These are fair terms: and if
you will agree to them, there is pen, ink and
paper; and we can draw up and sign the agreement."

"They're not as liberal as, considering all things, I might have expected."

"I will not go one shilling further," said Vavasour, doggedly.

"Well, I'm not a grasping man, Mr. Vansour; so there's my hand. You shall have the money as soon as wanted; and every assistance, both in the way of advice and testimony, which I or my wife can furnish. By the bye, who's your man of business? What firm do you employ?"

"In truth, I have hitherto had so little business to transact, that I've no regular solicitor."

"Then, let me recommend Dickens and Co.; they're honest, as well as able men; and will deal handsomely, I know, by any friend of mine," said Tomlinson, seating himself at the table, and beginning to write. "There, be so good, as just to sign your name to that paper. Yes-read it first, by all means. And now, let me give you a bit of advice. While you're here, don't go about saying there must be a Will: there's no occasion for it; and somebody may chance to ask you how you know that; and, taken off your guard, you may be led to say something foolish, and to look odd. Say little one way or the other. If a man happens to remark that there must be such a paper, answer him in an indifferent manner, that it is probable. If another says that people often die intestate, agree with him. Altogether, appear as if you neither knew nor cared a straw about the matter. Pay attention to Mr. Edward, but not too much, or they will say that you are a hypocrite; and there's no use in getting more ill names than we deserve; and go about a little amongst the poor people, and give them money; that's all the lower orders care It's all very well to talk of kind looks a gentle words; they don't care a rush for eit one or the other. Money's the thing th value; so give away, it's always best to ma friends. We can't say what evidence we m want, nor who may furnish it: so it's yo policy to make friends with every one. I is very popular down here ;- Edward Var sour, I mean. Proud and overbearing as he with his equals, he has always been a vi favourite with the tenantry. He made a poi of siding with them when there was any thing a dispute: had his own reasons, no doub Every man has some object in shewing kin ness."

"Do you suppose, that Edward Vavaso has been a party to the scandalous deception practised by my cousin?"

"No; I do not. I'm pretty sure, he has a suspicion of it. If he had had, he now would have been fool enough to try and man

he old one break with me. No, no; he knows othing of it."

"Then it will be a thunder-stroke when he oes know the truth." And something like a ualm of pity sprung up in Vavasour's heart; or he thought of Godfrey's late promotion.

"Never mind that. Never mind that. What dward may chance to feel, is neither your usiness, Mr. Vavasour, nor mine. And now, ood day. It's time I was gone."

Frederic Vavasour shook Tomlinson's exnded hand, with an appearance of friendliss he was very far from feeling; and when
at worthy had departed, he struck his foread, and groaned heavily. He was in a perfect
ony of mind. He knew himself, for life, in
power of a designing villain. He might
ceed in concealing the crime he had comitted. He might succeed in dispossessing
dward, and securing to himself the goodly
teritage he so much coveted; but what of
that? What if he were the owner—the lawful

owner of that fair domain, where would be the benefit? Where the enjoyment, whilst subject to this low, unprincipled man? To a certain extent, he had already been the tool of Tomlinson; henceforth, he must become his slave: and, that the wily knave would make the most of his advantage, was perfectly evident from their recent conversation.

Vavasour saw all this; and more than once, he was on the point of seeking Edward, of acknowledging his crime, and of endeavouring to effect some compromise; a measure rendered less difficult by the unsteadiness of Edward Vavasour's position. But he did not. And it was not shame which held him back; it was the love of gold. Edward, he believed, would willingly concede some restitution; perhaps, have offered his hand to Blanche; but would the acquisition of a sum of money, however great, or would an advantageous marriage for his daughter, bear a comparison with the possession, the entire, unfettered possession.

sion of so rich a property? Not in the eyes of one whose God is gold; therefore, with all the horrors of the future plain before him, Frederic Vavasour resolved to persevere.

He left Newstoke the day after the funeral, without betraying the slightest indication of his purpose; and proceeded straight to the metropolis.

CHAPTER XIX.

In about a month from this time, Blanche received a letter from her father, desiring her to forward, without delay, the already mentioned trinket box, just as it had been given to her by the late Mr. Vavasour; above all things, to be particular in enclosing the fragments of Mrs. Vavasour's letter; and little suspecting that this paper was destined to be brought forward as evidence against the validity of Edward's claim to the Newstoke Priors' property, conjecturing rather, that her father merely wished to restore it to him, she readily obeyed the injunction.

A few weeks afterwards, she received another letter from Mr. Vavasour, desiring her to proceed immediately to town. Some very singular circumstances, he said, had latterly transpired, which would probably place him in possession of the Newstoke property; and, as it might be necessary that he should remain in London, he deemed her joining him there advisable.

Blanche was absolutely bewildered on perusing this communication; Miss Bransby, at whose house she had been staying since her father's departure, equally astonished.

"I'm sure I can't make it out, my dear. I can't make it out, at all; and I'm really very much inclined to think your father must be mad, or something like it. He to get the Newstoke Priors' estate! Why, it is impossible, so long as Edward Vavasour's alive. Arthur, don't you think your father must be growing crazy? I declare, I shouldn't wonder if we were to hear he was in Bedlam, soon."

Arthur rubbed his hands. "I wish it may be true, that's all I know."

"Yes, my dear, and so do I. But, you

know, neither your wishing it, nor mine, will give Mr. Vavasour the property."

"I saw," said Blanche, thoughtfully, "a paragraph in the Morning Post, last week, which seems to cast some light on this mysterious business. I could not understand it at the time; nor should I, perhaps, have noticed it, had not the initials caught my attention. But now that the passage returns to my mind, alas! I fear, I greatly fear, papa is right."

"You fear it, Blanche?" asked Miss Bransby.

"Well, now, that's a good one; isn't it, aunt Letty? She's afraid of my father's getting fifteen thousand a year. By jingo, it's more than I am. I hope the news is true, with all my heart I do. We'll have rare fun at Newstoke Priors; won't we, aunt Letitia? I shall have a tandem and drive you out; a hunter, too; and a race-horse; as sure as I'm alive, I'll have a race-horse, aunt Letty."

"Hush, Arthur; do hold your tongue, and

let us talk quietly about this news. Where are you going, Blanche?"

"To the library, to see if I can find that Newspaper."

"Ah, that's a good idea. I dare say you will, easily enough; you know William files all the papers. But let me come and help you; nobody finds anything half so quick as I do."

Far rather would Blanche have been alone; but Miss Bransby was infinitely too much interested in the object of the search, to allow it to proceed without her aid. Ere very long, the newspaper was discovered; the paragraph read; and every syllable and word weighed and compared with Frederic Vavasour's communication. The initials agreed; and with this index, the meaning of the passage was beyond dispute.

"Well, my dear," said the elder lady, laying down the newspaper; "this, certainly, is one of the strangest freaks of fortune, I ever heard of. They talk of her wheel-turning; she's

named it now, I fancy, with a vengeance. To think of Frederic Vavasour, the curate of Marshampton, becoming all at once Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke Priors. It reminds one of the tricks and changes in a pantomime. Why, Blanche, you'll be an heiress, and may marry any man you like; I shouldn't be surprised if you were to get a duke. And as for Godfrey, he'll have all the pretty girls in England fighting for him. Even Arthur, poor fellow, will be quite a matrimonial prize. Wonderful, wunderful, indeed! And I wish you all joy of your good luck. At the same time, I must say, I feel it very odd, and not altogether friendly in your father, to have kept this so close: when he must have known too, how much interested we should have been about it. Even now, he doesn't tell us anything. But it's just like him; thinking of nothing but himself. And I wonder where he got the money from?"

[&]quot;Money?" inquired Blanche.

"Yes, my dear; money. You don't suppose all this has been effected without money. Nothing's to be done in this world without money."

"Poor Edward," said Blanche; "how he will feel the loss."

"Ah, I should like to know what will become of him. But above every thing, how this all came about. My dear Blanche," said Miss Bransby, with increasing energy, for her curiosity was strengthening every moment; "how very shabbily your father has behaved. He ought to have confided it to me, even if he told nobody else. But I rely on you, Blanche, I rely on you to send down every particular. You must make your father tell you every single circumstance, and write all to me."

"I suppose I must go to town."

"To be sure you must. Your father evidently wants you, or he wouldn't have sent for you. I dare say he's going down to Newstoke Priors; and as you were there so long, thinks you may be useful to him."

"In what manner," inquired Blanche, "in what manner, can I be useful at Newstokel And," she added mentally, "oh! how dreadful will it be to return there now, and under such circumstances!"

Miss Vavasour's spirits did not rally, on further consideration of the startling transition in her father's fortunes. On the contrary, the longer she pondered over the matter, the more she realised the singular event, the darker was the gloom that overspread her mind. Of the precise nature of the transaction, which placed the Newstoke Priors' property in Mr. Vavasour's possession, Blanche had not, of course, the most shadowy suspicion. But that the acquisition had been honourably made, she dared not even hope. There, surely, must have been some juggle, or mean chicanery, of which her father had not hesitated to avail himself. Lured by the love of wealth, he had probably become the tool of designing men; and a ruinous and unsuccessful law-suit would, there was every reason to believe, prove the consequence of his

infatuation. Then, how fearful the widening of the breach between herself and Edward.

Oppressed by dark forebodings, Blanche hinted her apprehensions to Miss Bransby.

"Law-suit? Law-suit? Your father go to law? Impossible, my dear! He never would be such a fool as that. Why, he'd be ruined. Besides, where is he to get the money from? No, no; he'll not go to law. I wish you wouldn't put such frightful notions into my head; I declare it makes me feel quite nervous, even to think of such a thing. All nonsense, though. I can't believe it. Your father go to law, indeed! pooh, pooh, no chance of it."

"To be sure not," cried Arthur. "It's only Blanche's moping way of thinking. She's always croaking about something; isn't she, aunt Letitia?"

"Yes, my dear, always;" Miss Bransby answered quickly. She really felt quite displeased with Blanche for disturbing the state of ecstacy she was experiencing. A state, towards which, there had been no approach since the day when those bright illusions Lord Warleigh's admiration of her niece had given birth to, were so cruelly dispelled.

For some hours, Miss Bransby steadfastly maintained her pleasant frame of mind. But all the passions are contagious. Fear, most especially. It was not very long before the old lady became the subject of various tremulous emotions, which, after much struggle to resist, many efforts to restrain, assuming the form of words, she thus addressed her niece on the night preceding her departure:

"My dear Blanche, do you know I've been thinking over what you said the other day about—about—the law-suit; and I begin to be afraid that it's just possible your father may be fool enough to get himself into the Court of Chancery. Now, if he does, he'll be ruined, as sure as I'm standing here."

"Indeed, dear aunt Letitia, I see great reason to fear-"

"Yes, I know; you said so, Tuesday; and I couldn't bring myself to believe you. It was so provoking to think, that instead of getting that fine property, you may all be beggars. And there's no use mincing the matter; if Mr. Vavasour's foolish enough to go to law, he'll ruin himself and all belonging to him. So, my dear, the only thing to be done is to prevent him. This, you must do."

Blanche shook her head despondingly.

"I've so little influence over papa. In fact,

"Nobody ever had;" retorted Miss Bransby. "Frederic Vavasour was always as obstinate as a pig. But whether you can restrain your father or not, there's one thing that you can do, Blanche, and that you must; although, perhaps, it won't be very pleasant. I mean, you must make him understand distinctly—are you listening, Blanche? Well then, you must, I say, make your father understand that, if he's goose enough to go to law, he's to expect no manner of assistance from me. I wont advance one farthing. Not a single farthing. Nothing in the world should tempt me to dabble in a law-suit, even with the chance of gaining twice as much as Newstoke Priors is worth. And what I wouldn't do for myself, I wont for anybody else. Tell your father that he's to expect nothing from me. I've done a vast deal for him and his children; and I don't say, that I mightn't be induced to assist him again in any reasonable way. But I will have nothing to do with law. I thought of writing to your father; but," added Miss Letitia, drawing up a little, "after the unfriendly manner in which he has behaved to me in this matter, it would be wanting in self-respect. I must, therefore, depend on you, Blanche, to state my determination to your father; as well as to send me all the particulars of this most astonishing business,"

CHAPTER XX.

BLANCHE found it no easy matter to satisfy ber aunt's curiosity. Mr. Vavasour avoided the subject as much as possible; and although her own anxiety equalled, if it did not surpass Miss Bransby's inquisitiveness, it was by snatches only, that his daughter could gather any information on a point thus interesting to her feelings. She learnt in this most unsatisfactory manner, that the cause had not been brought into a public court; Edward's claim, from the first, having proved itself so untenable, that he had immediately withdrawn it; and he was gone abroad, nobody knew where.

"But, papa," asked Blanche, one evening when her father's mood appeared more com-

municative than usual; "is he, Edward Vavasour, I mean, absolutely destitute?"

"If he is, it is his own fault. I wished to make a settlement upon him for life; offered him three hundred a year, but he didn't choose to take it. Whose fault, then, is it—his or mine, if he is poor?"

Three hundred pounds a year for the man who had been bred up as the heir of fifteen thousand! Blanche scarcely wondered that he refused the paltry offer; and afterwards, remembering all the pride and haughtiness of Edward's character, she felt assured that even a more adequate proposal would have been equally rejected.

He was then a fugitive; bankrupt in fortune, forsaken, frowned on by that world, which once had knelt before him: it may be, stigmatised, as a man who had been party to a disgraceful fraud. He, the honourable, the lofty-minded, the erewhile courted, and the rich! If Blanche formerly deplored the wound she had inflicted

on Edward's feelings, how did she now reproach herself; how did she wish that it were possible to live again that one eventful hour, which saw her frame and write the answer to his letter!

that for some time see searchy notices the singular life her latter set. He extend the it seemed, no meeting of visiting Newsons.

Priors; still see a manual that place future residence and Exchange State year relieved. Indeed that her latter has been added and the return the same as a first search as the streets seemed the streets seemed to be a search as although that despite the streets seemed to be a search as a search

At length where the loss of the loss of the loss of the length of the loss of

and, almost gasping for a purer atmosphere, she spoke of the country, of Marshampton.

"Marshampton," said Mr. Vavasour, "when shall we return to Marshampton? Why, never, Blanche. At least, never to our old house. I've given up the curacy. It was but a hundred and twenty pounds a year; and I thought it would look odd, if I continued holding it: besides, the thing was never to my taste; so I resigned, and my successor writes me word, that he has taken Laurel Cottage for three years, and will either hire or buy my furniture. I have not answered his letter yet; for I can't quite make up my mind as to which will be most advantageous. Second-hand for niture seldom fetches its value, or anything like it; therefore, it seems a pity to part with mint: but, on the other hand, Mr. Whatley has ! young family (six I believe), and people never take much care of furniture which is not their On the whole, then, perhaps it will be the best plan to sell. Don't you think so?"

know so little of such nations, was I : form at minute. I stayled, thereta, for an order. But page i ve to the . In Markemental where in you include Towards Imper I mine you said THE DE CTAR TEST. De the francisco in in in i. . . . CHECK THE IS CHARLE IT A والترارية الرفض في النظام المنظمين المنظمين المنظمين المنظمين المنظمين المنظم المنظمين المنظم It was the term to be E SERBOR FALL TO AFTER ADDRESS OF a time and a sum a part The second of the second of the second راعد الماريخ المعالية الماريخ المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية المعالية ME 1-2- 11 11 11 11 Egis Edu a e tal la fill The second of th SCHOOL AND STREET Min squitzerer: THE OFFICE HERE

Mh V. Austrian

poverty, he could not easily realise that he now the master of an ample fortune; trusting that time would loosen old habits, remove old impressions, she endured patien the many annoyances which his still some parsimony heaped upon her.

But time brought no improvement. Whe did it ever change the miser's heart? A that which Frederic Vavasour had been from necessity, he now remained from choice.

Blanche led a most unpleasant life. A occasional walk with her father, was her on relaxation; needle-work, her single occupation. She could command the use of a very slend library; for Mr. Vavasour had directed the the scanty stock of literary lore, of which I was master, should be considered a portion the furniture of Laurel Cottage, and dispose of with the rest.

They had few visitors. Once, indeed, to smartly attired persons, the one, quite a gu the other, her respectable mama, had called ent an hour with Blanche; but, that the stance was productive of small pleasure heroine, may be deduced from the fact e individuals being Mrs. and Miss Tom-

Vavasour and Banche were not, onwithout occasional finner company of ick Screen. Mr. Tominson, amosti, mes fined there, and a younger protecbearing the same participant, and so

The frequency made morning and Min Turners made their interest made in the second of t

Peter Tomlinson's suit, with any favourable eye.

He was, moreover, ill-bred, pushing, and uneducated; his appearance vulgar; his manner towards her, indelicately confident. It was not the timid, doubtful lover, but the man who feels that his addresses must and will prosper.

Under any circumstances, Blanche must have disliked the would-be gentleman. As the most distant acquaintance, she would have avoided him; but, as a suitor, a pretender to her favour, he was absolutely odious. And, inexpressibly disgusted by his forwardness, and weary of his assiduity, she, at length, importuned her father to refuse admission to the disagreeable young man. But vainly. Mr. Vavasour was evidently annoyed, almost as much annoyed as she was by Peter's visits; yet he declined to interdict them. He gave no reason for this backwardness; neither did he, when Blanche entreated that, at any rate, Mr. Tom-

son might be made aware of her disapproval his attentions, assign the cause of the negare she again received.

Perplexed and mortified, Blanche saw that ne path alone remained for her. To leave he room, if possible, when Mr. Peter Tomlinon was there; and while constrained to bear is presence, to let her manner teach him how finite a burden she considered his society. nd here, again, her father's conduct puzzled er. He disliked the young man, objected to is views regarding Miss Vavasour; still, if lanche's freezing system appeared to have ken effect in affronting Mr. Tomlinson, her ather would suddenly interfere, assure her it as dangerous to make an enemy of any one, nd request she would conduct herself with reater suavity the next time she and Tommeon might chance to meet; and, as if to inwe this meeting, call on the youth, and invite m to share a family dinner in Warwick treet.

The reader will, probably, understand Mr. Vavasour's inducement better than did Blanche.

Poor Blanche! Between Mr. Peter Temlinson's gallantry, and her father's extraordinary mode of life, her's was a wearisome existence; so wearisome, that a few lines from Miss Bransby, announcing her immediate presence in London, were received with actual pleasure; and when the old lady made her appearance, Blanche flung her arms around her neck, and almost wept for joy. Unaccustomed to demonstrations of this nature from her niece, aunt Letitia was quite affected.

"My dear child," she said, gazing earnestly at Blanche, "how pale and thin you are. Shouldn't have known you!"

"London is not a very pleasant abode."

"No, it is not; at least, not this part of the town. But what in the world made your father pitch upon this dingy, dirty hole—ch, my dear?" "Indeed, I can't tell. When I came to town, I found papa here; and we have never changed our residence."

- " Have you got the whole house ?"
- " Only a part."
- "Humph! Is there a room that I can have, or are the lodgings full? A bed-room, I mean."
- "Oh yes; there is one which communicates with mine."
- "Well, I'll engage it for a week. I don't imagine that I shall be longer than that in London, just at present. Shew me the room."

Blanche conducted her relative up stairs; and, after agreeing with the landlady to occupy it, and engaging a room above for her waiting-woman, Miss Bransby seated herself, and imparted to her niece the immediate object of her journey, together with a project she had formed within the last half hour.

"You see, my dear Blanche, the fact is this; I've had an exceedingly advantageous offer for purchasing my house at Marshampton; and I closed with it the more readily, because I find I can get excellent interest for the money. Moreover, Arthur has taken it into his head to study for the bar, and must live in London; so I think of taking a comfortable, genteel house somewhere near Russell Square, (I'm told all the lawyers live in that part of London), and consider it my future home."

"Arthur means to study for the bar? My dear aunt, he would make nothing of it. That hesitation in his speech alone—"

"Arthur would never be able to plead; but he might very well become what is called a Chamber Lawyer."

"But he has no mind; is almost deficient."

"He isn't first-rate, certainly; but, I dare say, he will do well enough. At all events, there's no great harm in letting him try, since he has set his heart so very much upon it."

- " Will you remove to London soon?"
- "Yes, my dear, immediately. In fact, we ust; for the house at Marshampton is mine longer. Arthur only lives on there till I've ttled matters here; so, to-morrow I shall hire brees, and drive about making inquiries at e different house-agents."
- "I shall be very glad to have you in Lon-
- "Thank you, my dear; and I hope I shall be a great deal of you. I mean to live very emfortably; a good house and carriage; brees when necessary. Mrs. Daventry used say, and she was a judge in these matters, not to live in London without a carriage, was very wretched sort of thing."
- "I believe, that living here is far more exensive than at Marshampton; so, at least, apa assures me."
- "Your father was always a grambler when money was concerned; and now, that he's grown rich, I shouldn't be surprised if he was

ten times more covetous than ever. It's constantly the case. He may be right, however. Still, I shall be able to manage it; for, between ourselves, Blanche, Mr. Fylaway, my new agent, (you must know, I have left Couts' house and placed all my money in Fylaway's hands), gets such good interest, that I shan't have less than fifteen hundred a year; and, surely, on that one may manage to live comfortably, even in London."

Blanche assented with cheerfulness; and it was sincere. She beheld with pleasure the prospect of her aunt's settling in London; pleasure considerably heightened by the apparently improved tone of Miss Bransby's feelings. Never, in her whole life before, had Blanche heard her aunt speak of money matters with the same degree of candour and liberality.

"And now for another scheme," Miss Bransby said. "You're looking wretchedly; evidently pining for fresh air and change; and I think I can get you both." " Can you, indeed?"

"Yes. I am going, when I put my affairs in some order, to pay a round of visits to old friends and acquaintances; and it happens, fortunately, that one of these is to a place where you may spend a week or ten days very comfortably. So I purpose going first to Wellclose House, that's the name of the place; and if you like the people, which there's very little doubt about, I shall leave you there whilst I go and fulfil the rest of my engagements."

"But I'm not invited, nor even acquainted."

"That's of very little consequence. The Marwells are the kindest-hearted people possible; and will, I know, be only too glad to receive any relation of mine. Mrs. Marwell's mother and I were formerly school-fellows; and I did her a kindness once, which has never been forgotten."

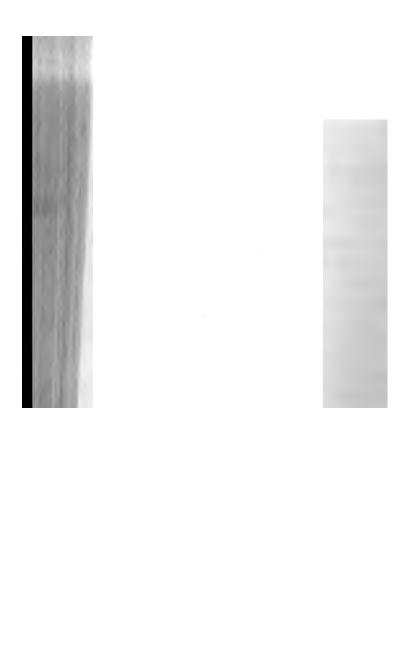
Blanche was not particularly charmed with this project of her aunt's; but the temptation of country air and quiet, even for a few hours, was almost irresistible; and Mrs. Marwell's answer to Miss Bransby's note, announcing her intention, was so very kindly worded, that she agreed to accompany her aunt. On the condition, however, that if the Marwells did not wish her to remain, she was to be suffered to return to town.

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON: SCHULZE AND CO., 13, FOLAND STREET.

WSTOKE PRIORS.

VOL III.



NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

BY

JULIA RATTRAY WADDINGTON,

AUTHOR OF "MISREPRESENTATION," &c., &c.

"Gold-the rich man's idol, and the poor man's dream."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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NEWSTOKE PRIORS.

CHAPTER I.

Wellclose House was in the neighbourlood of Cheshunt, and it was rather a pretty
place than otherwise. The grounds, although
not extensive, were well arranged; and the
louse, a large freestone building, perfectly
comfortable. One peculiarity struck Blanche
as amusing, and that was the incessant appearance of lions and lions' heads, wherever
such ornaments could possibly be placed.
There were lions rampant over the entrance
pates, lions couchant on each side of the steps
leading to the hall door. In the conservatory

a stream of water was projected from a hor's mouth. In the middle of the lawn, several monarchs of the forest supported a stone basket filled with creepers. In a rustic summer house, the seat was covered with a lion's shagg skin: and within doors, golden and bronza, marble and wooden lions met the eye in all directions. As a lion formed the family crest, that emblazonment also appeared wherever crests do usually appear. Then the carpet exhibited a crimson ground covered with stone coloured demy lions; and the hearth rugs displayed these animals nearly as large as life. To complete the picture, Mrs. Marwell, hereth, bore a striking resemblance to a lioness.

She was, however, notwithstanding this is militude, an excessively warm-hearted individual; who, under any circumstances, would have received her young guest kindly; but the was only too proud and happy, that Miss Vavasour, of Newstoke Priors, should be committed to her guardianship. So that when Miss

msby took her departure from Wellclose use, her niece remained behind, well satisd with an arrangement which procured her e enjoyment of pure air and garden rambles. One circumstance, still, detracted in no small egree from the enjoyment. Blanche very oon became aware, that Philip Marwell, the ldest son, would gladly follow Mr. Peter Tomnson's example; and she was vexed. Not hat, in any measure, the young men resembled ach other; for the one was as diffident, as the other was forward. So inoffensive, in fact, was Philip Marwell, that, to confess the truth, although when first alive to his intention, Blanche rejected the idea of countenancing his addresses; on after-thought, she hesitated. Her future prospects, her present home were 30 entirely without attraction, that a union with an amiable unobjectionable man, whose family were evidently most anxious to enrol her amongst its members, appeared a preferable Ilternative.

But to a high-toned female mind, marriage can never be a matter of selfish calculation. A woman of this stamp may, it is true, be induced to sacrifice her probity for the welfare of others, but never for her own; Blanche, therefore, quickly decided on the course she should adopt; and Philip Marwell was gently, but steadily, discouraged.

The family at Wellclose House, in addition to its heads, consisted of four sons; two grown up, two still boys, and three daughters; one at school, one introduced into society, and the youngest, a very intelligent but sickly child of about nine, whose education proceeded as it might.

"Eliza has no governess," said Miss Marwell to Blanche, "and mama's afraid of sending her to school; she thinks she's not strong enough, so she takes her lessons with the boys. Mama doesn't mean them to go to Westminster till they're two years older; she doesn't much approve of public schools; and would'nt let my brothers go at all, if papa didn't make a point of it."

- "How then is their education carried on?"
- "Oh, they have a tutor. Mr. Forrester is their tutor, now; he has not been here very long, and I don't imagine he will stay long either."
- "Mrs. Marwell doesn't like him?" said Blanche, aware that Mrs. Marwell was the sovereign of Wellclose.
- "No, it isn't mama that doesn't like him; mama likes every one, I think; but my brothers don't, nor papa."
- "Is Mr. Forrester very disagreeable? What does he do to make himself so unpopular?"
- "I don't know that he does any thing in particular; but he's very silent and seldom speaks to any body, and looks as if he was above his situation; almost, as if he considered he was doing us an honour; and you know, that is quite ridiculous in a mere tutor. Besides, John says

he's sure, he's very poor; and he is not even a clergyman."

- " I suppose Mr. Forrester is very clever?"
- "Oh, yes, he's immensely clever; so mama says, and my brothers, although they hate him, say the same. Some people too, reckon Mr. Forrester handsome; but I don't," Augusta said; with just enough of hesitation in her manner to give rise to a suspicion, that if Mr. Forrester had shewn himself more alive to her personal attractions, she would probably have proved a more indulgent critic.
- "How does it happen that I have never seen Mr. Forrester? Does he confine himself entirely to the study?"
- "Oh dear no, he always takes his meals with us, and comes into the drawing-room just like one of the family; at least, he may if he chooses; for he very seldom does. But you have not seen him, because he went away the very day before you and Miss Bransby came. His bed was wanted, and so mama told him,

that if he wished for a little relaxation, it would be more convenient that he should go now, than afterwards; but I believe he's coming back to-morrow, or the next day; although, if he knew of the dinner party to-morrow, I've no doubt, he would stay away over that day; for he hates seeing company, and when we have any, always looks so savage, gloomy and disdainful, that every body wonders who he is."

Blanche regarded this dinner party with nearly as much distaste as Mr. Forrester, and it was with listless indifference that she performed the necessary toilet duties. Her dress was very simple. In truth, she was not possessed of gay attire; and when it was completed and she stood before the glass, in plain white muslin unrelieved by any ornament, excepting a bouquet of flowers, she feared that her host might consider this extreme simplicity a slight.

" La, ma'am," said the lady's maid to whom she hinted her apprehension, "you needn't be afraid. It doesn't matter what you wear. Why I'll be bound, there's not a young lady coming, but will wish she was as plain as you; you couldn't look nicer than you do, if you'd all the satins in Oxford Street, and the lace, too." And comforted by this assurance, Blanche descended quickly to the drawing-room, for she was aware that she was late.

The room was already full, and anxious to shun observation, she joyfully availed herself of a seat proffered by Philip Marwell. It was only natural that he should remain beside her, and it was, likewise, only natural, that embarrassed by finding herself the object of almost general scrutiny, Blanche entered freely into conversation with her good humoured neighbour.

Their discourse was not of long continuance. A short, small, very smartly dressed young woman, who was seated on the sofa by Mrs. Marwell's side, after, with the assistance of an eye glass, reconnoiting Miss Vavasour, turned

and addressed her hostess: then, smiling and nodding in reply to the answer she received, rose and crossing the apartment, seized Miss Vavasour's hand and grasping it in hers, exclaimed:

"My dear Miss Vavasour, this is a surprise; quite an unexpected pleasure. I had not a notion we were to have the gratification of meeting you here. I hope Mr. Vavasour is quite well."

Blanche looked at her interrogator with mute astonishment; then coldly answered, that she had left her father in his customary state of health.

"You don't remember me, I see. Well, it's not surprising, either; although, I knew you again the moment I saw you; only, I doubted whether it could be you or not. But I had my bonnet on when I called with mama in Warwick Street; and so, of course, you couldn't see my features as plainly as I did yours. Be-

sides, I wasn't married then." The lady added with a gentle laugh.

"Miss Tomlinson," said Blanche; almost suatching her hand away.

"No, not Amelia Tomlinson, now; but Amelia Speenings. But I won't keep you standing."

Mrs. Speenings turned towards a table, where were spread various handsomely bound volumes, prints, engravings, &c.; and opening one of the books she began examining its contents. Blanche resumed her seat; but her glance followed Mrs. Speenings, for on that lady's plump wrist, entirely displayed by a white glove well pushed down, she beheld with infinite astonishment a turquoise bracelet, that had formed part of the trinkets given her by Mr. Lionel Vavasour.

It was a jewel of such singular workmanship that its identity might hardly be mistaken; besides, on raising her eyes towards Mrs. Speenings's head and neck, she perceived a necklace and earrings which she also recognised.

"Are you acquainted with this work?" asked Philip; placing one of the books before Miss Vavasour. But she could think of nothing but her ornaments, nor cease to marvel at their appearance where, and as, they did.

Often had Blanche endeavoured to repossess herself of those jewels; until Mr. Vavasour, weary of her inquiries, at length forbad the renewal of the subject; and, she imagined that, urged by his wonted avarice, he had parted with them. But, how Mrs. Alfred Speenings became their owner, perplexed Blanche inexpressibly.

"There," said Augusta, drawing close to Blanche, "that's Mr. Forrester standing behind that pillar."

Blanche looked mechanically in the direction indicated; and she started, for there stood Edward Vavasour.—Yes, Edward Vavasour.— And his eyes met hers; met hers with steady, cold, unfriendly glance: then, after bending them on Mrs. Speenings's ornaments, he looked once more on Blanche, and with a smile of scorn, turned hastily away.

"Miss Vavasour, I'm afraid you are not well," said Philip, while offering his arm to conduct her to the dinner table.

Blanche assured him that she was well; yet she grew almost sick with nervousness on perceiving that, as the table filled, by some accident the chair next her remained vacant; and she dreaded lest Edward Vavasour, or, Mr. Forrester, might again become her neighbour.

"I wonder what's become of Forrester?"

Philip observed; at the same time, casting a reconnoitring glance around the table. "Taken offence, I suppose, because my mother didn't make a point of introducing him to every body here. Quite unreasonable in a tutor. Don't you take soup?"

It was then clear, Mr. Forrester and Edward

Vavasour were the same person. Edward Vavasour was residing in that family under an assumed name; and in the onerous capacity of private tutor. It was no marvel that he was unpopular; for what man placed in a situation so adverse to his natural bent, so inferior to his former position in society, could be otherwise than unsocial, perhaps morose.

Alas! for Edward.—Blanche could scarcely restrain her tears; now that she had realised the fruit his altered fortunes had brought forth; the miserable plight to which that change had reduced him. Then, the disdainful, angry glance which he had cast on her—Blanche shuddered as the recollection crossed her mind.

"What do you think of the bride, Miss Vavasour?" Philip inquired; and Blanche called back her wandered, painful thoughts.

[&]quot; The bride?"

[&]quot;Yes. Mrs. Alfred Speenings."
Blanche paused in answering. To say the

truth, her opinion of Mrs. Alfred Speenings was not exactly such as might be made public; and her interrogator resumed—

"They call her pretty. For my part, I can't discover a single tolerable point about her, unless it's her complexion."

"Have you been long acquainted with Mrs. Speenings?"

"Never saw her before this afternoon. I've known him all my life. The Speenings are neighbours and old family friends of ours. But Alfred was only married about five weeks ago; and none of us, not even his sisters, had seen Miss Tomlinson before he married. I believe the Tomlinsons are —shire people. Do you know any thing about them?"

"You forget that Mrs. Speenings claimed my acquaintance."

"I know she did. But, I thought," said Philip, smiling, "you seemed as if you would have been better pleased if she had not recognised you: and, to say the truth, I'm not surprised at it. The Speenings made a great fuss at the time of the marriage and boasted of her fortune, and connexions, and all that. Still, I don't think there can be much blood; money she may have, but money's another thing: a shop-keeper's daughter may have money, you know."

"You said, I think, that the family are near neighbours of yours. Doesthis branch live near?"

"They are staying at present at Walmsley, old Mr. Speenings: but only on a visit. Alfred's a merchant, and is to live in London."

"Then," thought Blanche, "if they are staying in this neighbourhood, I may meet Mrs. Alfred Speenings; and if I do, most assuredly I will ascertain how these ornaments came into her hands; and if she can be induced to part with them, I will recover their possession; coax my aunt Letitia into lending me the money."

As the dinner proceeded, and Blanche saw her old rings flash on Mrs. Speenings' rosy fingers, and the glitter of the pendants in her ears, and observed her unclasp the bracelet in order to afford the gentleman who sat beside her a better opportunity for its inspection, she grew more decided in her meditated attack on her aunt Letitia's purse: for it struck her, that Edward might have recognised these very peculiar ornaments; and that to this recognition might, possibly, be traced at least some portion of the indignation which had lit his eye and curled his upper lip.

The evening proved very tiresome. Mrs. Speenings played and sung; Augusta Marwell did the same. Miss Vavasour was pressed to follow their example; but she steadily declined; and was in consequence pronounced an airified young lady; a most erroneous judgment. Blanche could not have breathed one note or struck a single chord. She had neither nerve nor voice.

She learnt nothing of her ornaments: once, indeed, she made an effort to ascertain their history, but it was a fruitless one. Mrs. Speenings, offended by Miss Vavasour's former cold accueil, retaliated by scarcely vouchsafing to notice her observation.

Happy was Blanche, when the evening was concluded; and light the footstep with which she sought her chamber. She longed to be alone, in quiet, to review all the strange circumstances of the last few hours; and she felt vexed, when Augusta Marwell, who affected a mighty friendship for Miss Vavasour, overtook her, and passing her arm through her's, said,

"Let me come into your room for ten minutes, will you, dear Miss Vavasour? The pleasantest part of a party is the talking it over; and I do so long to hear what you think of Mrs. Alfred Speenings. Is she really a fashionable-looking person? I can't—"

Here Augusta checked herself; for turning into a rather narrow corridor, the young ladies found themselves suddenly confronted with Mr. Forrester. All appeared surprised; and two, embarrassed. Slightly bowing to

Augusta, he drew back, in order to make way for them. But Miss Marwell seemed scarcely inclined to avail herself of the free passage thus afforded. On the contrary, pausing in front of Edward, she began inquiring why he had disappeared, whether from indisposition, or from objecting to meet so large a company; and she proceeded to inform him that the party had been extremely pleasant, and his absence the subject of much regret and inquiry.

The latter was true enough. Mrs. Marwell, vexed at the ungraceful appearance of Edward's vacant chair, had even despatched a servant to learn the cause of such vacuity.

"I was not quite well," he answered, coldly.

"At least, I did not feel equal to the hardihood of intruding myself into a circle where my society would, I believe, have been distasteful; and where my feelings could not but have been distressed."

"Dear, Mr. Forrester," interposed Augusta, while Blanche stood trembling with agitation,

speechless from embarrassment, "what can you mean? Your feelings hurt, and you not welcome! I am sure there never was a greater error. Mama would not have suffered your feelings to be hurt by any one for all the world; and as for you're not being welcome, I can only say that a great many people inquired about you, and expressed their sorrow, when we said we supposed you were not well."

"I am greatly indebted to them. The interest even of strangers is sweet to a man who is both poor and friendless."

Blanche, aware that this speech pointed at her, felt some reply absolutely necessary; and she was beginning to speak, when Augusta, thus reminded of Miss Vavasour's presence, and fancying Mr. Forrester would reckon himself slighted if not regularly introduced, interposed,

"Mr. Forrester, I don't believe mama introduced you to Miss Vavasour before dinner; you came, both of you, so late into the diningroom it wasn't possible. Allow me to make you acquainted."

And they, who knew each other intimately; they, relations, who had been friends, and how much more than friends! were regularly introduced as though they had never met till now.

A haughty inclination of the head was Edward's portion of the ceremony; while Blanche, crimson with confusion, dared not raise her eyes from the ground. She made a slight bow, and then, unable any longer to endure the awkwardness of her position, urged her companion forward.

"Isn't he handsome?" cried Augusta, when in Blanche's room, and entirely forgetting that she had formerly decried Mr. Forrester's attractions. "Isn't he the handsomest man you ever saw? And so gentlemanlike. Very proud, though. Think of his hardly bowing when I introduced you to him just now. I do believe he is the most scornful man in the world."

"I imagine you are right," Blanche answered, vacantly; and while Augusta, thrown into high spirits by remarking that, reserved as Mr. Forrester had been towards her, he was even more distant towards Miss Vavasour, continued to expatiate in his praise, Blanche was revolving in her mind the most desirable method of convincing Edward, that she did sympathize with him.

Notwithstanding his present uncongenial mood, she did not anticipate much difficulty in accomplishing this entirely natural wish. They were under the same roof; many opportunities must, therefore, occur when she might explain her conduct, free herself from the reproach of having parted with those jewels; perhaps, altogether wipe away the stain left by wounded pride and exasperated feeling on his mind. The very circumstance of his upbraiding her, by affording an opportunity of self-justification, would render this comparatively easy. Her non-recognition of Edward caused her little

regret. Had she not seen him act similarly on an occasion painfully resembling the present!

It must not be supposed, however, that Blanche's thoughts towards Edward were all of a gentle nature. No—there were moments when the remembrance of the withering glance he had fastened on her, wakened a spirit nearly as haughty as his own. But those mournful words—"friendless and poor"—spoken reproachfully, but still as if he knew their meaning in its bitterest extent, came back to Blanche's mind, and quickly changed all harsh emotion into soft pity; or, it may be, into yet softer love.

CHAPTER II.

On entering the breakfast-room on the following day, Blanche found Mrs. Marwell alone, and apparently much discomposed.

"It's very provoking, my dear Miss Vavasour," she said, after the usual salutation had been spoken; "it's one of the most provoking things I ever knew!"

Blanche, supposing her hostess's lamentation to arise from some awkwardness on the part of her domestics on the previous day, expressed a hope that nothing very disastrous had occurred.

"Oh, no; it's nothing of that kind. There's been no accident; my servants are all extremely careful. I make a provision when I hire a servant, that whatever's broken is to be replaced; of course, I give higher wages in consequence. There's nothing broken; but Mr. Forrester—"

"What of him?" asked Blanche, with more eagerness than she was willing even to acknowledge to herself.

"Why he's taken himself off—gone away; in some tangent, I suppose. And yet, to save my life, I don't know why. However, gone he is; and we are without a tutor for our boys. Just when we were going to the sea, too; isn't it provoking? But it's always the way in this world, the more kindness and consideration you shew people, the less do they shew you. Will you take tea or coffee? Augusta," (the party had been gradually assembling,) "Augusta, Miss Vavasour will thank you for a cup of coffee. My dear, how ill you look to-day."

" I've got a head-ache. I think I'd rather

not have any breakfast." And Augusta left the room.

"Well, Mr. Forrester's a great fool; that's all I can say," Philip remarked. "Of course, you'll not recommend him to another family."

"I recommend him ?—No, indeed," responded Mr. Marwell. "When did Mr. Forrester go?"

"This morning. He left a few lines, saying that he was very sorry, but that a circumstance of the most painful nature rendered his remaining here impossible. I'm sure, I can't conceive what he can mean."

"I wager anything he fancies, insolent puppy, that Augusta's fallen in love with him."

"I should hope, Philip, that Mr. Forrester understood his position better than to imagine any thing so presumptuous."

"As for that, the lower men are in the world, the more presuming they very often vol. III.

prove themselves. Besides, didn't she fall in love with Teddington, Forrester's predecessor?"

"Mr. Teddington paid a great deal of attention to your sister, Philip," said Mrs. Marwell, reprovingly; "and very wrong it was in him highly improper."

" Pooh! the love-making was all on her side."

"You are mistaken; Augusta was not partial to Mr. Teddington, not in the least. He was in love with her; and forgot himself so far as to make himself particular; and that, I must say, Mr. Forrester never did, which was one reason for my wishing him to stay; for you know," continued Mrs. Marwell, addressing Blanche, precisely as though she had been a person of her own age, "that where young people are thrown a good deal into each other's society, it's a very unpleasant circumstance, if one happens to become attached; although,

nobody can deny, that it's only natural when a man sees a pretty girl day after day, that he should lose his heart."

From this moment, Blanche lost all the interest she had begun to feel for Miss Marwell. Augusta, it was evident, was one of those young ladies whose hearts, like touchwood, are always ready to ignite.

It will be supposed, how greatly she was disappointed by this abrupt overthrow of her hopeful castle-building; and how deeply mortified she felt, as the conviction that her presence had driven Edward away, forced itself upon her mind. Alike unable to second Mrs. Marwell's reprehension of his conduct, or to sympathize in the attachment which the weak Augusta now committed to her confidence, vexed and unhappy, she lost all her former enjoyment at Wellclose House; and painfully desirous to leave a spot, where either to admire or to blame Edward Vavasour was the perpetual aim of the conversation, she saw

her aunt Letitia's somewhat old-fashioned chariot approach the house with considerable satisfaction. It was well for Edward Vavasour's incognito that he had withdrawn himself from Wellclose House; silence from Miss Bransby, on such an occasion, would have been absolutely hopeless.

The next day, Blanche bade farewell to her kind and hospitable entertainers.

"Yes, my dear," said Miss Bransby, when after a great deal of fidgetting, and placing and displacing of the work and dressing-boxes, and other small packages destined to share with her and Blanche the inside of the carriage, the old lady appeared at last to feel herself at ease;

—"yes, I'm come sooner for you than I said I should. You see, the fact is this; I'm one of those persons who, when they've once begun a thing, let it be what it may, like to see it finished. I hate dawdling. As I've taken that house in Bedford Place, and mean to furnish it, I shan't feel easy till it's all done.

Moreover, I'm getting too old to feel comfortable any where but in my own good house; so I just hurried through my visits and came back. And now, Blanche, I want to ask your opinion about the drawing-room furniture. I can't quite make up my mind whether to have the curtains damask or chintz. If it were for a country house, I should say, chintz; but for dirty, smoky London, I do think a light chintz (and they make them all so light now) will be very extravagant."

"Yes, but so much prettier."

"Very true; a pretty chintz is an extremely pretty thing, that there is no denying, and it costs less in the beginning; so I think I shall decide on chintz. Then the colour, I mean the fringe, which would you have, blue or rose-colour?"

Blanche did not know; she thought the prevailing colour of the chintz should settle that of the fringe. Her aunt acquiesced. In fact, Miss Bransby was in such excessively good humour, that she was willing to agree to any proposition which did not outrage common sense.

Blanche was well wearied, long before they had reached town: still, she could not but observe with heartfelt satisfaction the surprising transformation that had passed upon her aged relative. She, who, despite the caustic diatribes she allowed herself to launch against Mr. Vavasour's extreme economy, had always, hitherto, followed most unquestionably the saving system; who, notwithstanding, occasional acts of liberality had been almost as niggardly as he, appeared now in a novel and greatly improved character. Extravagant she certainly was not in her projected arrangements; but far removed from meanness, or undue economy.

In fact, Miss Bransby was approaching that period of existence when man leans towards childishness again; and this new scheme of her's had become a sort of toy. She was amused, and her heart dilated; her temper lost its natural querulousness.

"Don't you think, Blanche, that if I were to offer the postboy sixpence, or a shilling, more than his due he would set us down in Bedford Place? I do so long to see how they're getting on."

"Papa dines punctually at five; it's now nearly four; if we go to Bedford Place, do you think we could be back in time?"

Miss Bransby saw the force of Blanche's remark and relinquished her idea.

CHAPTER III.

- "Well, Mr. Vavasour," exclaimed Miss Bransby on entering the drawing-room, with quite a jaunty air, "here we are, come back again, nearly a week sooner than we intended."
- "Ah, brought back by this confounded filure, I suppose."
- "Failure? What failure?" asked Miss Bransby, quickly.
 - "What, you haven't heard it?"
- "Heard what, Mr. Vavasour? Do speak; remember, we've been staying in the country where one hears nothing. Who has failed?

- "Eh, what? Fylaways?"
- " Aye, Fylaways."
- "Perhaps," urged Blanche, for Miss Bransby was speechless with amazement and horror, there may be a mistake; these rumours are not always to be trusted."
- "It's no rumour; here, read this paragraph in this morning's Times. I only wonder you did not hear it from your friends at Cheshunt."
- "I hate newspapers; they always tell one what is disagreeable," thought Blanche, while her father pointed out the following passage:
- "'We regret to state, that the firm of Fylaway and Co., of Snowhill, stopped payment yesterday.'
- "You see, there can be no mistake: Fylaway and Co., Snowhill."
- "It's impossible!" burst, at length, from the agitated Miss Bransby; "and I won't believe a word of it. Why, Mr. Vavasour, every farthing of my money, except a trifle I kept for daily expences, is in Fylaways' hands:

and now you come and tell me they have broken. It isn't possible, it isn't possible, I say."

Mr. Vavasour elevated his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders and laid down the newspaper. Miss Bransby, after a moment's consideration, darted across the room and rang the bell.

- "Why do you ring? It's not dinner time yet."
 - " Dinner! I'm not thinking about dinner."
 - "Then, what do you want?"
 - " A hackney coach."
 - " For what ?"
 - "To take me to Snowhill, to be sure."
- "What's the use of going to Snowhill, at this time of day? None of the partners would be there, even if they hadn't smashed; and, as they have, I suppose you know, that it's more convenient for them to play, least in sight, just for the present.
- "It doesn't matter. I shall go to Snowhill and ascertain the truth of all this; for, I tell you

plainly, Mr Vavasour, that I don't believe it can be as you say. Blanche, my dear, I must have your company; really, I'm so nervous I don't feel as if I could go by myself."

"As for that," said Mr. Vavasour, "if you're determined upon going, I will go with you; at the same time, I must say, I think it's nothing better than a fool's errand you're setting out upon. Why not wait till to-morrow, when I can walk down into the city, and make inquiry as to the amount of dividend you are likely to receive; for with regard to the bankruptcy itself, there's no more doubt of it than of my standing here. Wait till to-morrow—that's much the wisest plan."

But Miss Bransby would not wait; into the city she would go that very hour; Mr. Vavasour, therefore, having desired the dinner to be kept back, handed her to the hackney coach, and took his seat beside her.

They were not very long away; and on their re-appearance, it required no language to assure Blanche, that the news so unwelcome to Miss Bransby, was perfectly correct; the poor old lady's countenance was quite sufficient.

"There," cried Mr. Vavasour, "take your aunt up stairs and get her to bed if you can. She's been in screaming hysterics all the way home; couldn't manage her at all; never had such a drive in all my life; thought I should have had the police after me, to know whether I wasn't murdering her. Get her to bed, get her to bed as fast as possible; she looks exhausted, and no wonder after making such an uproar. She's too old, too old a great deal for this sort of thing; should have left her money quietly in Coutt's house; and then all this wouldn't have happened."

Miss Bransby did indeed appear exhausted; she neither spoke nor attempted any resistance when Blanche offered to lead her up stairs; and when there, suffered her dress to be unloosened, still in passive silence. It was only when Blanche proposed her lying down, that Miss

Bransby's powers mental or bodily appeared to recover something of their usual tone.

"No, no," she answered pettishly, "don't lay me on the bed; I'm not tired, not at all tired; and I couldn't sleep if you'd give me worlds. Yes, I will have some more hartshorn; it revives me. And, Sarah, go—I don't want anything. You fidget so about the room, you worry me. Never mind folding up those things; leave them as they are. May be, I shall never want to wear them. You know, they wouldn't be suitable now, Blanche. Shut the door gently, Sarah, and go down stairs. Miss Vavasour will stay with me; and I can ring if I want you."

Sarah withdrew exceedingly reluctantly, as may be readily conjectured; and for a few minutes, neither Blanche nor her relation spoke. At length the latter broke the painful silence,

"What will become of me?" she said, almost crushing Blanche's fingers between hers from the intensity of her nervousness, "what

will become of me? To be beggared at my age;—Blanche, what a dreadful lot! And Arthur, poor Arthur—but I suppose your father will take charge of him."

"Yes, yes; and of you, too."

Miss Bransby shook her head, mournfully.

"Blanche, your father is a grasping manhe may give his son a home, indeed, he must—
but for me—oh, he will never give me a single
shilling; although I have often, very often,
stood his friend when money was wanted."

"Nay, my dearest aunt, you must not judge papa so hastily. Let me speak to him; and I am persuaded you will not find him unmindful of all your past kindness to himself, to Arthur, to all of us, his children."

A sharp emotion shot across Miss Bransby's features, and imparted to her countenance a deeper character of mental agony.

"Blanche," she said, drawing her hand away from her niece, and clasping both her withered palms together, "I have brought this misfortune, this terrible misfortune, upon myself. It is God who punishes my avarice; as the Scripture says, 'for the iniquity of my covetousness, I am smitten.' Listen-there was a time when life, yes, life itself, was at stake; your brother's life, and I could have saved it. Money alone was wanting; I had money, but I would not part with it. Although your poor mother begged, for her dying infant's sake, I would not grant her prayer. Well, Blanche, I kept my gold, and your young brother died. He died, I say, and Sophy never once upbraided me. She never told me that I might have saved her sweet boy's life. No, she said nothing; but from that hour, her heart gave way, and she and Willie were laid side by side. And at the time, I scarcely felt how cruel I had been, for I had money; and every thing went on so prosperously, that I never stopped to think, or ask myself, whether I had acted as a Christian should have done. But God has treasured up the memory of my sin; and this is the hour of retribution. Aye, he has made the very money I refused to give your mother, the means of punishing me."

Miss Bransby paused for a few seconds; but excepting to proffer a word of kind sympathy, Blanche made no comment upon her communication, distressing as it was to her. She believed the utterance of her aunt's feelings would assist in calming them; consequently, far from endeavouring to restrain Miss Branshy's volubility, she encouraged it.

"Yes, that money has been the means of punishing my avarice; for, you see, it was that which first made me acquainted with Fylaway's house. My brother banked with Coutts, and so did I; but I had saved it out of the weekly expences, and I did not wish him to know about it, which must have been the case, if I had put it in Coutts's hands. So I made inquiry, and I heard of Fylaway; and now, you see, what it has all come to. I am ruined; a beggar; without a home, almost

without a guinea, I can call my own. But I must not complain; I have deserved my fate, hard as it is; and I must not murmur. It is the Almighty's will, and may that will be done!"

As she uttered this pious ejaculation, tears, the first the sufferer had shed since learning her misfortune, slowly wandered down her furrowed cheeks; and Blanche hailed with thankfulness, those welcome evidences of a softened heart.

There is a blessing in adversity, when it is given us to read the solemn admonition right;
—so understood, the very fiat, which curtails the sources of our frail enjoyment here, oft proves the title deed of an inheritance vast, rich, unchangeable, and everlasting. Hitherto, Miss Bransby's religion had been limited to forms; but here was a token of the spirit's power: and Blanche, who had latterly thought much, and seriously on this all-important subject, rejoiced, even while she wept, over the happy transformation.

CHAPTER IV.

"LET the ladies know that dinner is on the table, and beg them to make haste; we're more than half an hour behind the usual time already," said Mr. Vavasour; and the direction was obeyed.

"Go down, my dear Blanche, go down; or perhaps your father mayn't be pleased. I'll try and get a little sleep." And Blanche, although, in truth, she had small inclination for food, took her place opposite to her father.

"Well, how is she now?" he inquired; while carving a large leg of boiled mutton. "How does she find herself? getting more reconciled?"

Blanche answered, that her aunt was certainly more calm.

"Great nonsense that going to Snowhill; just throwing money away for no good whatever; so I told her, but she wouldn't listen to me. I would give something to know what in the world induced her to put her money into Fylaway's hands," Mr. Vavasour rejoined; and he added a great deal more in reprehension of the folly Miss Bransby had betrayed in the management of her concerns. Mr. Vavasour's temper was put out of joint, by the delay of his favourite meal.

Blanche did not attempt to vindicate her aunt. She saw that such a course would only still more exasperate her father. She merely spoke of the poor old lady's mental sufferings, and the severe loss she had sustained; and when the meal was ended, and Mr. Vavasour's complacency in some degree restored, she summoned courage to mention Miss Bransby's future prospects.

"What will become of her?" he replied.
"Why, her relations must take care of her to be sure."

Blanche's heart leapt; here was an admission of the duty and necessity of assisting her client; and she ventured to inquire, whether he would not join in this good work; or rather, whether he would not, as he was now so very wealthy, take the whole duty upon himself.

"I?" said Mr. Vavasour, pushing back his chair; and looking at his daughter with as much surprise as might have been elicited, if she had made some most extraordinary proposition. "I furnish Miss Bransby with an independence? What in the name of wonder can you be thinking of?"

"You said, papa, that the members of my aunt's family must provide for her necessities."

"Well, supposing I did. I'm not one of them. I meant her own nephews and nieces, to be sure. She has plenty of them. Let them do what is necessary. Besides, there's her sister, the widow, why can't she live with her?"

"Papa, there was always a great deal of jealousy respecting the preference and kindness my aunt has invariably shewn us. Her adopting Arthur, you know, occasioned great umbrage."

"Well, it was her own fault; I didn't want her to take Arthur."

"Still, at the time, it was a great relief to you; was it not?"

"Why, yes; perhaps it might have been; Arthur was sickly, and sickly children are very troublesome, as well as expensive. But although she did take charge of Arthur, that was no reason why she should not have had one of the others staying with her. She had plenty of money to have kept half a dozen, if she chose; besides, the same table that does for two, will dine three; so there would have been no additional expense, if she had taken one of his cousins."

"Even," said Blanche, "if one of my cousins, or Mrs. Swinton should be willing to offer a home to my poor aunt Letits, what is to be done about her personal expenses?"

"Her personal expenses? Oh, they can't be much: very little will cover them; and Fylaways talk of a dividend; I don't suppose it will be much more than nine-pence, or a shilling in the pound: but still, ample to furnish her personal expenses; and, I should think, enable her to contribute something towards the housekeeping."

"And can you do nothing, absolutely nothing, in consideration of her kindness to us?"

"Who do you mean by us?"

"Arthur, me, Godfrey; she has been kind to all of us,"

Mr. Vavasour spent a short time apparently in calculation, and at length replied—

"I suppose, I must do something."

"Indeed her claim is very strong; consider her age." "Blanche, your aunt's age is nothing to me. The question is, what I can do for her? And, weighing all things carefully, considering, I say, the enormous expense which this law business has entailed on me; together with other calls upon my purse, which it is needless to explain, I conceive, that in allowing her to share my table and your sitting room, I am doing quite as much as can be expected from me. From Arthur I shall, of course, immediately release her. I will give her, as I said, her board; her relations must provide for all other expenses, including the hire of her sleeping apartment."

Blanche remembered her father's recent observation respecting the identity of expense consequent on entertaining two individuals or three; and nothing but filial piety kept down the emotion of indignation and contempt, to which his ingratitude and meanness gave birth.

"I cannot do more, Blanche;" said her father, partially reading her thoughts. "I can-

not do one farthing's worth more, so don't expect it. I'm over head and ears in debt already. And, by the bye, I should be glad if you would remind her of the foolish expedition she has been this afternoon; for which I've not the slightest intention of paying. I'll thank you to tell her she must repay me the coach hire. Such nonsense in her to insist on going!"

Miss Vavasour did not in words contradict her father's assertion respecting his pecuniary embarrassments; but the eloquent eye and curling lip plainly demonstrated how entirely devoid of truth she believed his statement, and the contempt with which his falsehood had inspired her.

"At least," rejoined Mr. Vavasour, shrinking before that reproving glance; "at least, I'm so far in debt, that I have considerably overdrawn my banker's account; in addition to which, all the law expenses are not yet discharged." "Papa," Blanche asked suddenly, "those jewels of mine?—Did you dispose of them by way of warding off these heavy law expenses?"

"Blanche, I thought I told you, I was tired of being asked about those trumpery ornaments."

"Give me a direct and candid answer to this one question, and I will never again broach the subject. Did you dispose of them? Papa, I have a right to know. Did you sell my jewels?"

"No, not exactly. The fact was this. There was some evidence of the first importance which could only be furnished by those Tomlinsons; indeed, my claim to the Newstoke Priors' property would scarcely have been sustained without their co-operation; for, Mrs. Tomlinson, you see, had once been servant to Edward's mother; her testimony, therefore, was of the utmost consequence, and I was obliged to conciliate her. Well, she wished for those jewels, having remembered them

when in Mrs. Vavasour's possession; and a hint was given, which I did not think it prudent to neglect; especially, as none of the trinkets were of any great value; -so I-I-made a compliment of them to her. There, Blanche, now you have the whole story. Her husband, too, appeared excessively desirous that she should have them; I don't know why, exactly; but I believe, there had been an old quarrel between him and Edward, and he thought it would vex that gentleman to know that his mother's ornaments had become the property of her former maid." Mr. Vavasour continued, on seeing that his daughter considered his reasons for parting with her ornaments exceedingly unsatisfactory. Edward's name recalled him to her mind.

"I have lately seen Edward Vavasour," she said, in a low, hollow voice.

"Indeed!" exclaimed her father; " and where, may I ask?"

Blanche related every circumstance of their recent meeting.

"Ha," returned Mr. Vavasour, rubbing his hands together; "you met, then, as strangers? I rejoice to hear it: and I hope, Blanche, that you and he will never meet on any other terms."

Miss Vavasour scarcely divined her father's motives for this wish; nor did she attempt to ascertain them; but observing that his frame of temper had materially improved, she resolved to make another effort on her unhappy aunt's behalf. Like its predecessor, the attempt proved futile: nothing further might be gained from Mr. Vavasour; and when, after ringing the bell for the purpose of ordering the tea, he desired she would inquire whether Miss Bransby chose to partake of the refreshment, Blanche left the room reluctantly; it would be, both, so painful and so mortifying, to inform her client of the distressing issue of her intercession.

"Some tea? Yes, Blanche, I shall be very glad of a cup of tea. Not here, however, I

won't give you the trouble of bringing it up stairs; and Sarah worries me; I cannot bear to have her in the room. I will go down stairs."

And together they descended to the drawingroom; Blanche, rejoicing that her trying disclosure was deferred; and hoping, though not,
alas, with any real grounds of confidence, that
before an explanation did occur, some proposal
of a more liberal and friendly nature might
have suggested itself to her father. She was
startled, therefore, as well as vexed, when, after
swallowing a cup of tea, Miss Bransby suddenly adverted to the subject.

Letitia Bransby had never been gifted with much delicacy of feeling; and now, rendered desperate by the prospect of destitution, not only did she, herself, bring forward the distressing theme, but in a manner, very few people could have adopted. She asked Mr. Vavasour, point blank, "what he intended to do for her?" "Do for you? Do for you?" He answered, taken by surprise.

"Yes. What provision will you make for me? You know, when I had it, I spent sums of money upon you and your children; and now, that I'm beggared, I suppose—in fact, I feel assured, that you are ready to do as much by me."

"It can't be said, that you are absolutely beggared."

"Not absolutely beggared? Why haven't I lost every farthing of my five and twenty thousand pounds? I don't know what your notion of beggary may be, Mr. Vavasour; but in my opinion, I'm not very far from it."

"There'll be a dividend."

"Yes; they talk of paying ninepence or a shilling in the pound. What good will that do me, I should like to know? Most likely I shall be dead, long before it's paid."

"Oh, that's nonsense: your life's as good as anybody's,"

"And supposing I do live to receive this paltry dividend,—by the bye, how much will it be? For my head's in such a state I can't calculate. What will a shilling in the pound be?"

" Exactly twelve hundred and fifty pounds."

"Is that, really, all I shall get out of my five and twenty thousand?" said poor Miss Bransby, scarcely able to steady her voice. "Twelve hundred and fifty pounds! And that, only doubtful; for the clerk said 'perhaps.' And I know, every body knows, that they always make the best of these things. Twelve hundred and fifty pounds instead of five and twenty thousand! Oh, what a fool I've been! But, Frederic Vavasour, you are rich, and will never miss the trifle that would make me comfortable. You will assist me, will you not? I shan't want much; nor shall I want it long."

"Yes;" said Mr. Vavasour, "I've told Blanche, that I am ready to do what I can for you." "You've spoken to Blanche about it, have you? Oh, how kind: and she never mentioned it to me," Miss Bransby answered, casting a sharp, reproachful, glance on Blanche, who looked down; and when she heard her father repeat precisely the paltry offer he had intimated to her, she blushed to her finger tips for shame.

Miss Bransby was some little time in comprehending his intention. With all her knowledge of Mr. Vavasour's avarice, she had not supposed such meanness possible: and when she did fully receive the idea, a perfect blaze of indignation shot forth.

The object of her contemptuous wrath listened with calmness; and, finally, reminded the exasperated old lady, that if she were dissatisfied with his proposal, there existed no necessity, whatever, for her accepting it. Undoubtedly, there were many other quarters where she might find relief; and numerous relations, on whom her claims for pecuniary

assistance was infinitely stronger than on

Such a display of cold blooded ingratitude still further irritated Miss Bransby, and with the tone and aspect of a perfect fury, she replied—that he, and he only, should maintain her.

- "Yes, Mr. Frederic Vavasour, you—you, I say, shall provide the means of my subsistence; from no one else will I receive it."
- "I feel myself greatly honoured, Madam, by the distinction you propose conferring on me; but, will it not be as well to make sure of concurrence, before you speak so confidently on a point where my co-operation is, I should imagine, of some importance?"
 - " You shall concur."
 - " Indeed!"
- "Yes, indeed. You shall concur, I say. Be quiet, Blanche, and let me settle this matter for myself. You shall provide me with the means of subsistence, suitable subsistence; it's

your duty, Mr. Vavasour, you ought to do it, and you shall. If you won't by fair means, you shall by foul."

"Blanche, your aunt is mad; poor woman, she is actually beside herself. Do get her up to bed and give her something composing; if you and Sarah can't manage her, I suppose we must call in medical advice. For my own part, if this goes on much longer, I shall begin to think that a straight waistcoat will be necessary."

"No, Mr. Vavasour, I'm not mad. I want neither straight waistcoat nor apothecary: I want nothing but common, decent, gratitude and propriety of feeling. I'm not beside myself; I'm as sensible as you are, more sensible, as you'll find to your cost, if you persevere in this unreasonable—shameful—unnatural—unmanly conduct."

" Take her away," repeated Mr. Vavasour, impatiently.

Blanche gently drew her aunt towards the

door. Miss Bransby went quietly until she reached the threshold of the room, when suddenly turning, with an air of great solemnity, she said:

- "Frederick Vavasour, once more, I ask, whether or not, you will allow me a sufficient sum for my necessities?"
 - " I have told you what I mean to do."
- " And that is really all?"
- " All. I will not give one farthing beyond what I have already proposed."
- "Enough," rejoined Miss Bransby, still with excessive solemnity; "then, you must be made to do it; and you shall."
- "By what means, pray?" he inquired, in a tone of less security than formerly; for the manner of her late address had rather served to awe him. "What means do you propose to employ in coercing me?"
- "Public opinion. Yes—the shame, the execration, you will bring upon yourself by this unnatural, this disgraceful, conduct."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Vavasour, turning on his heel. "Public opinion will trouble itself mighty little about an old woman, who has been fool enough to let herself be done out of her money, as you have."

"We'll see who's the fool." Miss Bransby answered. Then taking Blanche's arm, she proceeded, slowly, to ascend the stairs.

Her whole frame trembled with agitation; her lips were livid, while her cheek was literally scarlet, and her eyes bloodshot and glaring. Blanche held her aunt's parched hand in hers, and she feared that in such a state, sleep was a blessing almost beyond the pale of hope. She was, however, mistaken; Miss Bransby slept, slept soundly; at her age, distress of mind leads to exhaustion rather than wakefulness.

Miss Bransby slept long and calmly. It was not so with Blanche: her night was one of restlessness; for, in addition to natural solicitude respecting her relative, she was anxiously debating in her mind the most efficient method of furthering her interests. Their recent most unpleasant altercation rendered Mr. Vavasour's expedient, paltry as it was, utterly impracticable; they never could continue inmates of the same house. But where would Miss Bransby find shelter? and where, the means of providing for her personal expenses? Blanche thought and thought, and her aunt's case seemed almost hopeless; until she suddenly called to mind the legacy bequeathed her by her uncle, Captain Bransby.

According to the wording of the bequest, this sum was to remain untouched, until Miss Vavasour attained her one and twentieth year, and then, with its accumulated interest, to be delivered into her hands. As yet, Blanche was barely twenty; consequently she had no legal right to dispose of her little fortune; still, she had heard of money being raised on even less stable security, and strange as such transactions were naturally to her, she resolved to

place as large a portion of her anticipated wealth, as she could make herself mistress of, at her unhappy relative's disposal.

Thus resolved Blanche; and in forming this determination, she saw no merit in the sacrifice she contemplated; for she was generous, open-hearted, above all, young; and the young are rarely avaricious.

CHAPTER V.

Miss Vavasour's decision was, however, infinitely easier to frame and to adopt, than to carry into execution; and, more than one anxious hour was spent in seeking the quarter, where she might address herself with the fairest prospect of success.

The solicitor Mr. Vavasour usually employed was obviously ineligible; entire secrecy as regarded her father, being, she was aware, essential. But Blanche could recollect no other; and still perplexed, and anxious, if possible, to effect her purpose in time to prevent a further breach between Miss Bransby and Mr. Vavasour, she rose at an early hour, and having re-

quested the owner of the house, a tidy, kindhearted widow, to grant her half an hour's conversation, partially unfolded her intention, and entreated Mrs. Williams' co-operation.

Of course, in the first instance, Mrs. Williams expressed herself unable to assist Miss Vavasour; buttouched, at length, with Blanche's earnestness, and half suspecting her object, she informed her that, on more than one occasion, having had to deal with troublesome tenants, and other vexations which rendered legal assistance necessary, she had employed Messrs. Clarkson and Co. of Chancery Lane, and had been invariably satisfied with them.

"Chancery Lane? Is that far off? How can I go? In a hackney coach, I suppose. Is it very far off, Mrs. Williams? Do you think they will be civil to me, when I make my appearance? Are they accustomed to see ladies enter their office? And can I, can I, go alone?" asked Blanche, feeling her resolution falter, now the time for action seemed at hand.

Mrs. Williams hesitated for a minute, then said:

"I am afraid, Miss Vavasour, that it wouldn't altogether do for a young lady like you to be going out in a hackney coach, all by yourself, and driving to Mr. Clarkson's office, to consult him, and he quite a stranger. I'm afraid, you might find it very unpleasant—so many clerks, and all sorts of people, about."

- "Yes; but what can I do? This money must be raised, and raised immediately."
 - " Couldn't your papa manage it for you?"
- "Oh, no, no. Papa must know nothing of the matter."
 - " Nor Miss Bransby "
 - " Nor Miss Bransby."
- "Well then, her maid. Couldn't you send a note by Sarah, or take her to Mr. Clarkson?"
- " No; Sarah might betray me. I must go alone," and Blanche turned very pale.
 - "Well then, my dear," said Mrs. Williams,

"I tell you what, I'll go with you. Don't be cast down, I'll go with you."

"Thank you; oh, thank you."

"Only, I don't very well see how we can manage it; at least, not to-day. The business hours don't begin till after nine; and Mr. Clarkson is never at the office much before ten. Now that's just the time that I am most wanted here. Besides, this is my marketing morning."

"Do you happen to know where Mr. Clarkson lives? Because, we might, perhaps, contrive to see him at his own house, if we set out immediately: it is still early; not more than half past seven, I believe. Don't you think I might contrive to gain an interview with him before he leaves home?"

"Well, that's a lucky thought, a very lucky thought, indeed. Mr. Clarkson's got a country house at Hampstead, a very sweet place; and there he generally lives. But when the family's in town, and I rather think they are in London now, they live not ten minutes' walk from Golden Square. If you like to take the chance of finding him——"

"Yes, yes. Let us go, immediately," cried Blanche. And in less than half an hour, she, and her conductress, stood at Mr. Clarkson's door.

The servant shewed considerable reluctance in admitting them: but Mrs. Williams, who acted as spokeswoman, negociated so judiciously, that after a few minutes' parleying, Blanche, breathless with agitation, was conducted into a dingy back parlour, where she was almost instantly joined, by a tall, gaunt, looking man, attired in dressing gown and slippers, whose manner was abrupt, and whose countenance was far from encouraging.

He was, evidently, exceedingly astonished by his client's youth and general appearance. Perhaps, also, a little vexed; for Mr. Clarkson did not like doing business out of business hours: moreover, he was slightly indisposed; and had intended to indulge himself with idleness that day.

Blanche found, therefore, greater difficulty in unfolding the object of her application, than she had even anticipated; and the very serious aspect which her auditor assumed, together with his perfect silence during the time she spoke, combining with the entire novelty of her position, augmented the embarrassment to such a pitch, that, at length, she lost all power of governing her voice, and her final entreaty for assistance, was uttered in an hysterical scream. Still, Mr. Clarkson looked very grave, very forbidding.

"Your name, madam?" he said, at length, "is, I believe, Miss Turner?"

"Vavasour, Blanche Vavasour."

"Vavasour? Any relation to Mr. Frederic Vavasour of Newstoke Priors?"

"His daughter."

"The daughter of a man of fifteen thousand a year, and you wish to raise money—to raise it furtively?" "You are acquainted with papa?" cried Blanche, more terrified than ever.

"No; I have not that advantage; at least, not personally." And Mr. Clarkson drew himself up, and took a pinch of snuff.

"Can you, will you, assist me?" asked Miss Vavasour.

"Miss Vavasour," he answered, with excessive gravity, "I will acknowledge, that this is a transaction in which I scarcely like to interfere. I know these things are common, very common: still, I always discourage them as much as possible; and there are many reasons why I would rather wash my hands of this. If you will take my advice, you will pause before you engage in an affair, which really appears scarcely becoming a young lady of your age. How came you to apply to me at all?"

Blanche explained; and wound up her explanation, by saying, passionately,

"If you refuse to help me, Mr. Clarkson, where, where, can I find assistance?"

"Have you been gambling, young lady?" he asked severely.

"Gambling? Oh, no, no." And, shocked by the degrading suspicion, rendered almost desperate by agitation and anxiety, Blanche narrated the whole history, without even attempting to palliate her father's cruelty and meanness.

Mr. Clarkson was pleased by her candour. Accustomed to deal with human nature in its most revolting forms, to behold all the worst passions hurried into action, he had learnt to understand his fellow creatures; and he saw that his present client was speaking faithfully; that her inducement was pure and noble; in a word, that she might claim his praise, challenge his admiration, rather than deserve reproof. Still, he disliked the transaction on which she had embarked: and though, eventually, he did agree to give her his assistance; did promise, that through his agency, a portion of the sum she wished to raise should be furnished, pro-

vided, of course, that on examination, the security should prove such as she represented, it all was done in so reluctant a manner, that when Blanche took her leave, it was with very slender hope, that her mission had really been successful.

Mr. Clarkson made an uneasy breakfast. He could neither talk, nor read the newspaper; nor dismiss anything like his usual complement of toast, and eggs and butter. He scolded the servants; snapt at the children; contradicted every word his loving spouse gave utterance to; in short, did all and every thing some married gentlemen feel themselves at liberty to do, when their tempers have been crossed. And when, about a couple of hours after Blanche's departure, the door of his study was again opened, and he, informed that a lady wished to speak with him, he pettishly refused admission to the fair applicant. "He was," he said, "unwell; and neither could, nor would see any body."

Mr. Clarkson was, however, doomed to learn by that day's experience, that, although an Englishman's house might be his castle, it is far from being an impregnable fortress. Hardly had he resumed the volume of light reading wherewith he had intended to drive Blanche and her unwelcome business from his thoughts, when the door was again thrown back, and a little old lady shot into the room with a degree of vivacity which actually startled him.

"Madam," exclaimed the astonished man, perceiving that his visitant had actually seated herself without a word of invitation on his part, "madam, I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. There must be some mistake. You are, I suppose, a lady seeking advice?"

"Yes;" interrupted the intruding dame.
"I am a lady; and I come to ask your advice
and assistance in an affair, where I have been
treated in a most disgraceful, shameful, and
most ungentlemanlike, manner."

"But this, Ma'am, is not the proper place

for such application. This is my private house, ma'am; my office is in Chancery Lane."

"I know it, Mr. Clarkson; I have just been there: but as you were not to be met with, I drove back here."

"My partner, Madam, --- "

"Your partner, Sir, won't do for me. I always prefer transacting business with the principal. I don't approve of partners. My agent, Fylaway, took a partner into the firm, and it was that partner who ruined him; so I believe, at least, for he never failed before."

"Mr. Smith is, however, perfectly responsible; I place the utmost confidence in Mr. Smith."

"I dare say you do. But, Sir, I choose to speak to you, and to nobody else; and so I came here; and, now, I shall be obliged by your listening to me with attention."

Mr. Clarkson, seeing that Miss Bransby was immoveable, resigned himself to his fate; at the same time, making up his mind that the Press orders, had that morning admitted two seints should indemnify him for the loss of the presse and quiet he had vainly promised himself.

Aunt Letitia told her story; and wound up the somewhat prolix narration, by informing Mr. Clarkson, that she intended to bring an action against Mr. Vavasour, for recovering monies expended by her on his youngest son's behalf; and that four thousand pounds would be the very lowest sum she would accept as such remuneration.

- "Have you any agreement?"
- " Agreement?"
- "Yes; when you undertook the charge of that young gentleman, did his father agree to reimburse you the money you might expend on his account?" inquired Mr. Clarkson. And as Miss Bransby was possessed of no document of this nature she was informed that her claim would be untenable; and that it would be folly to endeayour to substantiate it.

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But an exasperated woman is, we all know, an exceedingly unreasonable individual. For a long time, aunt Letitia could not be persuaded that she was mistaken; and, although, at last, Mr. Clarkson did contrive to shake her confidence in the strength of her position, he failed in inducing her to relinquish the lofty ground she had assumed; not even the idea of expense could drive her from it.

"I don't care whether I'm right or not; to law I'm resolved to go: and if you don't choose to undertake the cause, I must look elsewhere for assistance. As to the expense, Mr. Clarkson, I don't care for that either: there will be a dividend upon my property when Fylaway's affairs are settled; and, for the present, I have money enough to carry on the suit."

" But, Madam, you must lose your cause."

"I don't care if I do. I don't care even if I'm made a beggar by it. I am determined to expose that man's wickedness and meanness. I don't care what it costs me. So, Mr. Clarkson, you'll be so good as to do whatever may be necessary."

"You ask four thousand pounds?" said Mr. Clarkson; "or an annuity of as many hundreds? You won't get one farthing. However, if you are bent upon going into court, I suppose I may as well undertake the business as any other man."

"Better," Mr. Clarkson should have said; for he was interested in the matter, not as a lawyer, but as a man of feeling. By a singular coincidence it happened, that he, whose assistance Blanche had sought at the recommendation of her landlady, and Miss Bransby by pure accident, had been Edward Vavasour's legal adviser; so that, previous to either lady's application, his feelings had been enlisted against the sordid Frederic Vavasour.

"Thank you, Sir;" said Miss Bransby rising, "I'm sure, I'm very much obliged to you." And she returned home in a far more hopeful frame of spirit than had done her niece.

CHAPTER VI.

In as short a time as possible, Mr. Vavasour received a notice on the subject of Miss Bransby's projected suit. He laughed at the idea; and instructed his man of business to inform hers, that Miss Letitia Bransby might go to law or not, just as she pleased; the only consequence of such a step on her part would be, the withdrawal of his offer of providing her with board: and the sordid Frederic Vavasour chuckled at the prospect of saving her daily glass of sherry, and the sugar for her tea; these being articles where the maintenance of an additional person, must of necessity, occasion additional consumption.

The lady, however, continued firm: perhaps,

because Mr. Clarkson advised her to give way: and she was, likewise, fully satisfied of an eventual triumph, possibly, because repeatedly assured that her expectations were without legitimate foundation.

True, therefore, to the spirit of her sex and individual character, Miss Bransby stood her ground unflinchingly; and faithful to the want of refinement she had ever displayed, in place of withdrawing from her opponent's roof, she continued there, and took her seat in the drawing-room, or at the dinner table, with the most perfect ease and freedom, discoursing upon every subject but one with her accustomed fluency; and, when occasion called for them, passing precisely the same strictures upon Mr. Vavasour's conduct or opinions as she would have done had she and Frederic been circumstanced as formerly.

Blanche's position was painful; her father's teasing. Both, ardently desired a change in aunt Letitia's tactics; to both, her absence would have proved the source of infinite relief; but neither had the power of effecting her departure. Blanche could not actually say to her aunt, "Under existing circumstances, I think your leaving us would be advisable;" nor Mr. Vavasour, "I wish with all my heart and soul you would take yourself out of my house, you troublesome old woman." For the present, therefore, her presence must be endured; and they could only hope, that in time something would arise to carry her away. Mr. Vavasour looked for invitations from her other relatives; Blanche, to the money she trusted to receive through Mr. Clarkson's agency.

But Mr. Vavasour's expectation was far from sanguine; nor, indeed, was Blanche's more secure. He knew, well enough, that in this cold and calculating world there are not many people willing to encumber themselves with the charge of an impoverished, aged woman; and his daughter could not conceal from herself, that so much of rancour towards her father

cient judge of my own affairs, I shall feel obliged, if spared interference which I do not desire; and which many gentlemen would consider officious, to use the mildest term."

"No offence, Sir, no offence; I am sure none is intended. For my own part, I know nothing of the merits of Miss Bransby's case; excepting, indeed, what I've learnt in the way of business." Not very long since, Peter had been admitted as partner in the firm of Dickens and Co., Mr. Vavasour's solicitors. "I know, I say, nothing of the merits of the case, and should not have dreamt of speaking to you on the subject, if it hadn't been for this letter of my governor's; but, as he is very urgent, I thought it wouldn't do not to let you know his opinion, and the reasons he brings forward."

" Pray, may I inquire what reasons Mr.

Tomlinson is kind enough to give for his interference?"

"They are only friendly, Mr. Vavasour. What else should they be?"

" Aye, but what-"

"Why, Sir, if you insist on knowing my father's motive for wishing you to put a stop to this matter, it is because he thinks that the less you and your affairs are brought before the public, the better. Don't mean to offend you, Mr. Vavasour. I'm sure I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world; but my father says—"

"Well, Sir, what does your father say? Nay, never flinch; out with it."

"Why, you know, that Newstoke Priors' business—my father says, the less public attention is drawn to it the better. I know nothing of the matter; wasn't in Dickens's house when the dispute took place; so can't offer any advice respecting it. But this, as a lawyer, I may say, that if there should be any thing connected with that business which you would

rather did not transpire, you had better follow my father's advice; for when once a Chancery suit is set a-going, there is no telling where it will stop, nor what it may lead to. I am speaking in a general way; not as cognisant of your dispute with Mr. Edward Vavasour. I know nothing about that—nothing," said Peter, but evidently not with sincerity. "However, my father expects to be in town, himself, e'er long, and he'll talk the matter over with you. Good morning, Sir—good morning."

Tomlinson withdrew, leaving Mr. Vavasour to decide on the merits of the advice he had just received. For a whole hour, he remained firm to his previous resolution, and full of indignation against the insolent, officious Tomlinson. The next, he felt his spirit flag a little. Miss Bransby returned from a consultation with her solicitor; and, whether correctly or not, Frederic fancied that her manner

betokened unusual elation of spirits. In the evening, also, Arthur arrived from Marshampton; and backed by this proof of the justice of her claim, the old lady grew even bolder and more confident than ever. After resting for a moment on him, her sharp grey eyes would turn and shoot the most upbraiding, yet triumphant, glances on his Sire; and numberless and cutting were the inuendoes and sidelong speeches addressed to Blanche, but pointing still at Vavasour.

Not often, in the whole course of that individual's life, had he spent a more uncomfortable evening than this; and finally reflecting, that an exasperated woman was no despicable opponent; for, as a rabid cat is a more dangerous antagonist than a mad dog, an angry female is, not unfrequently, more difficult to manage than an irritated man; that old maids are, almost all, remarkably fond of litigation; that there was, therefore, very little chance of Miss

Letitia's giving way; that her presence in his house was positively an infliction—an infliction, also, from which there appeared no prospect of relief—he began to think that Mr. Tomlinson's advice, impertinent as it at first might seem, was not altogether destitute of sense; and, after a night of restlessness, and conflict between his love of money and these numerous considerations, Vavasour came to the determination of following the counsel he had so scornfully rejected, by offering, as compromise, an annuity of two hundred a year.

"She's breaking fast; can't last above a year or two," thought the niggardly Frederic. "Very likely won't live a twelvemonth. Besides, she's so bewitched with that awkward, unlicked cub, Arthur, that I dare say it will end by her taking him again."

The proposal was spurned by the stouthearted spinster. Not one farthing would she was eventually adjusted, by her receiving her requirement, on condition of Arthur's being thrown into the bargain.

All parties experienced very considerable satisfaction from the arrangement. Miss Branshy's exultation, however, source is above that of either of the others. F. y satisfied that the successful issue of the every on Mr. Vavasour, resulted soals from the validity of the claim sie had acres to the Letitia ceased not the expension of the trace. mon sagacity, penetration, whose all the entensive legal knowledge. Those of the te her self-complacency that it visited a second to reconcile her to the second of worldly fortunes has alterated and among panied by Artius : A task - -the carriage which was المراسية وووا cheap watering-page to accommodate the present resting-page sin dence, with perior. same: - -

CHAPTER VII.

"Good morning, Mr. Tomlinson. Hope I see you well, Sir. Some time since we met. Hope all the family's quite well."

Peter, for he was the person thus addressed, shewed little inclination to return the salutation. Only a few minutes before, he had parted from Miss Vavasour, in one of her haughtiest moods, and his temper was still considerably ruffled. Moreover, his would-be acquaintance was an exceedingly shabby, even suspicious-looking, individual. Below the middle size, and thin almost to attenuation, the spareness of his form was rendered even more conspicuous by the loose great coat which,

reaching nearly to his heels and hanging in folds about his person, appeared to have been made for a much larger man. It was buttoned over; the sleeves, too long by at least a couple of inches, almost precluded the necessity for gloves, whilst the length of the skirt concealed the nature of his nether garments. No linen was any where apparent. A rusty hat was slouched over his forehead, while a tawny silk handkerchief entirely concealed his mouth and chin.

Peter passed on without speaking. The other persisted—

"You don't remember me, I see. Well, it's no wonder! I'm not the man I was when your father and I—by the way, where is Tomlinson? At Newstoke?"

By this time, Peter had recalled the stranger to his recollection.

"Wing-" he began.

"Hush! Never mention names. Mine is Newton." "Newton, is it? Pray, Mr. Newton, may I ik what you want of me?" said Peter, with much loftiness of manner as he could mume.

"Only, only," Newton answered, humbly.

Mr. Newton, I shall be glad if you'll allow me to pass on. Really, for a gentleman like me to be stopped in this manner in the public streets, is exceedingly unpleasant. Sir, I don't wish for—" your company, Peter would have added, but Newton cut him short.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Varabour is to be met with?"

"To be sure I can. I will be home only on minutes again. When it you want of a min

"There are some papers I was an water were to him. It a Mr Vereson of deventor Priors. Edward, I was at see!"

Then you must wan und, he were a re to town. He's town in the parameter of w

"Nach and a Harman and a con-

I sail to-morrow, or the next day, at the latest. Where is he? Can you give me his address?"

"He is not at Newstoke Priors, I know. But where he is I can't exactly say. I tell you what, though," Peter added with great and sudden earnestness, "if those papers are of any consequence, you'd better not trust them out of your hands, whether you get the right address or not. Wait till he comes back to town."

"I can't. I sail to-morrow for New York. Before I left America, I engaged that Edward Vavasour should have those papers. He did a kindness to my wife's father, once; and when she died she made me promise to put him in possession of them. Now, how can that be done?"

"The easiest thing in life. Leave them with me. I'll see that they go in the right direction."

Newton passed a few minutes in consideration. "Are you a friend of Edward Vavasours?"

"To be sure I am."

"And your father?"

"Just what he always was. True to the family."

"I suppose he may be trusted. At all events, I see nothing better for it," Newton said, mentally; then, added aloud,

"You will deliver the papers, faithfully?"

"Never doubt it."

"Come with me, then."

They walked together until Newton stopped in front of a wretched looking house in one of the bye-lanes in the vicinity of Covent Garden.

"Is this where you hang out?" asked Peter, while he turned hesitatingly from the door.

"I won't detain you two minutes," said the other, ringing softly.

The door was opened and Peter glanced suspiciously along the passage.

"Supposing I get my throat cut? Or my

brains knocked out? Don't like the looks of it at all. Just the sort of place where a min might get his skull cracked, before he'd have time to look round him."

"Make haste. I've not a minute to spart. Come in, I say."

As he spoke, Newton drew Tomlinson within the door, which was shut instantly.

"A rum looking place as ever I saw," thought Peter, wiping his forehead; "and I wish with all my heart I was well out of it."

He followed his conductor up the dilapidated staircase, and into a room, dark, filthy—every way repulsive.

"Sit down; I shan't be long," but Peter was infinitely too much frightened to remain stationary.

"There," said his companion, after turning over a variety of papers, "there's the packet. Now, remember you give it to him."

Peter's eyes glistened as he took a rapid glance at the document; and forgetting his recent uneasiness he extended his hand to Newton.

"Sorry to see you in this miserable plight. Shouldn't mind taking a step or two to serve you. Is there anything that I or my father could do?"

Newton groaned.

"Do you chance to have heard any tidings of my poor mother, lately? She's alive I know-"

"Yes, yes, alive and kicking. Hearty as ever she was."

"Are you likely to see her? If you are, tell her that I am well—in health, at least—and that, one day, she may expect to hear of my being a—a—rich man."

"Not much chance of that, I reckon," thought Tomlinson, looking round.

"You will be careful of that packet? Remember you give it into no man's hands but Edward Vayasour's."

"Trust me, my good fellow, the papers

shall go into the right channel," said Peter, whilst his countenance betrayed so much undue satisfaction, that Newton regretted the confidence he was placing in him; and he made an effort to regain the papers.

Peter grasped them tightly.

"Never fear, old boy," he said; "I'll give them to the proper person, set your heart at ease. And I'll tell your mother that I've seen you, and how well you are, and—Good bye."

"Stop," cried the other, as Tomlinson opened the door of the room. "Stop, I say." But Peter, young and active, was already half way down the stairs. "Stop," shouted Newton, at the same time following with as much speed as he could muster.

His efforts were vain. Peter cleared the last flight of stairs almost with a bound, rushed along the passage, tore open the street door, and darting through, scarcely abated his speed until he gained an adjacent thoroughfare. Then, believing himself to be beyond pursuit,

he placed the packet in the breast pocket of his coat, buttoned that tightly over, and proceeded homewards, his usually unmeaning features beaming with exultation.

Newton returned slowly to his dormitory, and threw himself upon the only chair the room contained.

"Well," he said, after musing for a few seconds, "well, I have done my best; and if that fellow plays me false, it's not my fault; at all events, I couldn't have managed better. Still, I wish—however, there's no use thinking of it; it's too late, now. The matter must take its chance; and I must look to myself."

He passed his hand across his brow, as if to drive away an unpleasant train of thought; then rising, began collecting together some articles of wearing apparel, that lay scattered about the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Peter had said, Mr. Tomlinson, senior, shortly after, arrived in town; and, self-invited, came to dine in Warwick Street.

It will be readily believed, that this worthy individual had not continued satisfied with the bargain, as originally struck between him and the guilty Vavasour. On the contrary, his applications for loans of money—loans which, in fact, were gifts—were as incessant as the backwardness with which those demands were answered was unequivocal. His presence, therefore, was always unwelcome; and now, that his entertainer guessed his errand, his reception was even churlish.

"So, Vavasour, you followed my advice about that old she relative of yours. Confounded plagues, female relations; never satisfied; always wanting money, advice, or something. A woman should marry; and if she can't get somebody to have her, why she'd better hang herself. Ha, ha-no use, you know, to anybody." Mr. Tomlinson began, after Blanche had left the dining room. "And talking of marrying puts me in mind of a little love business which nearly concerns us both. It seems, that my son Peter-sharp fellow, Peter; will make his fortune, or my name's not William Tomlinson; uncommonly sharp. I almost wish now that I had bred him to the bar. He would have done capitally; argues so well, makes you believe black's white, or anything else he chooses; just the man to turn a jury round his little finger. I warrant, he'd bring a client off in the teeth of law and justice, ave, and the public press, too .- Well, I say, Peter Tomlinson has contrived to lose his

heart to Blanche Vavasour; and if you have no objection to the match, and will give Blanche a fitting marriage portion, I shall make none either; although, to my mind, Peter's rather young to marry."

"Mr. Tomlinson," said Vavasour, drawing himself up, "this is a subject which I beg may never again be mooted between us: my daughter's marriage with your son is utterly impossible."

"Glad he has said that," thought Tomlinson.

"Glad he's said 'no' to the proposal; he won't venture to refuse again; and I'd rather have the money than the connexion. "She doesn't like him, I suppose?" Tomlinson added audibly.

Mr. Vavasour merely bowed.

"Well, there's no accounting for a lady's likings or dislikings; nor controlling them either; so, I suppose, we must leave this matter, for the present, at least. By and bye, perhaps, she may alter her opinion, eh, Mr.

Tavasour? And now for business; now, we've lone with love we'll go to business, my good riend." And Tomlinson drew his chair nearer to Mr. Vavasour, while he moved his away. "This county coronership—"

"You shall have my interest; I believe I pledged it some time back; and I wish to adhere scrupulously to all we then agreed upon."

"Yes," rejoined Tomlinson, "I dare say you do. But, it's no use, in this instance, what you wish: the appointment's as good as lost."

"Indeed !"

"Yes. There is a strong party making against me; the Revelys, Lord Montford, and all that set; so that I don't intend even to try for it. Great disappointment, though, very great, indeed. Worth a cool three hundred a year."

[&]quot; Aye ?"

[&]quot;Not one farthing less. I dare say to you, now, three hundred a year's a mere bagatelle;

but I'm a poor man, you perceive; and as I reckoned upon getting it, I don't altogether see how I shall manage to do without it; particularly as I'm likely to be rather hampered in future. My family's expensive. Mrs. Tomlinson's health is not good,-Then Peter, it's not a trifle will pay his tailor's bill, I can tell you. Not that he's extravagant; but young men will dress like gentlemen, and so indeed they ought, and I don't wish him to do otherwise. And there's my daughter, Mrs. Alfred Speenings, who's not long married; I engaged to allow her two hundred a year; so that, altogether, losing this Coronership's a terrible cut up. However, as Mrs. Tomlinson reminded me when we were talking the matter over, (I keep nothing from Mrs. Tomlinson)" Mr. Vavasour started. "Oh not that, not that, of course. I'm a man of honour, Mr. Vavasour. and don't betray my friends; but my own concerns, I make a point of having no secrets about them; for Mrs. Tomlinson's a shrewd

woman and her opinion's worth taking: well then, I say, Mrs. Tomlinson, seeing how cast down I was about the loss of this place, said, 'Why what a fool you must be, Tomlinson, to be fretting and fuming about a loss that will be no loss at all; Mr. Vavasour has passed his word that you should be three hundred pounds a year richer; and, of course, he'll stand to it. He's a gentleman, you know, and can't do less than make it up, if you do lose the situation. He's bound to do it; and of course, he will."

Judging by Mr Vavasour's countenance, he was very far from agreeing with Mrs. Tomlinson; on the contrary, he considered, that having avowed his willingness to support her husband, he had done all that could be required; when, therefore, Tomlinson proceeded to inform him that, in his estimation, six thousand pounds would prove but a slender compensation for the loss of the appointment, he gave a decided and indignant refusal.

As usual, Tomlinson pressed his demand; until Vavasour, irritated by the sacrifice he had been obliged to make in favour of Miss Bransby, and resenting the affront lately offered to his daughter, lost all command over himself, and applied to his companion epithets, which, had their subject been a gentleman, must have induced an hostile meeting. Tomlinson turned white with rage; but the early part of his life had been spent in a vocation where temporary self-controul becomes habitual; and mastering his anger, he merely answered:

"Very well, Mr. Vavasour. Very well, Sir. This is the last time I treat you as a friend. Perhaps, you'll be sorry one day for what's just happened. However, it's your affair, not mine; and if you don't know the difference between a friend and an enemy, you must just take the consequences of your blindness. It's your loss, Sir, not mine. It 'll be a deal easier for me to make up for my disappointment, than for you to meet with such another friend as William

Tomlinson, I take it. Good evening, Sir; good evening."

"Won't you take tea?" asked Frederic, already trembling for the consequences of offending Tomlinson, and willing to appease his wrath by any means short of pecuniary sacrifice; "won't you take tea before you go? Miss Vavasour will feel quite disappointed if you don't give her the pleasure of seeing you above stairs. And, talking of my daughter, puts me in mind of yours. I think you said, Miss Tomlinson was married not long ago; where is she settled?"

"In London," growled Tomlinson. Mrs. Alfred Speenings lives in London; and if I mistake not, has taken the liberty of leaving her card for Miss Vavasour."

"Indeed! My daughter has never mentioned the circumstance, or I am sure I should have been delighted to have paid my respects to Mrs. Alfred Speenings. Possibly, however, Blanche never got the card. Servants are so

careless. But, come up stairs, and we will ascertain it."

For a few moments, Tomlinson hesitated. When Frederic Vavasour pleased, the fascination of his manner was irresistible; and little accustomed to familiar intercourse with the wealthy and highborn, the ci-devant valet experienced excessive difficulty in repelling the friendly overtures of, as he would have said, "a real gentleman."

Tomlinson was irresolute; half overcome by Vavasour's suavity—half still resenting his intemperate rudeness. The latter feeling, at length, however, conquered, and they parted; though, not, apparently, in unfriendly mood. They even shook hands; and Mr. Vavasour, encouraged and deceived by this appearance of cordiality, entered the room where Blanche was sitting, with a comparatively buoyant heart. He felt, that if he could only succeed in checking Tomlinson's demands for money, his future life might prove peaceable enough;

and he regarded their recent conversation, and the manner of its termination, as an earnest of success.

Still, it was, obviously, most important to cultivate the friendly feelings and to soothe the temper of his worthy coadjutor. His vanity, also, it would be politic to flatter. Consequently, Blanche was sharply questioned respecting Mrs. Alfred Speenings' visit; and having acknowledged that the card had actually come into her possession, she received a severe lecture, followed by an injunction, to hold herself in readiness to accompany her father on the morrow to Upper Bedford Place, where the Alfred Speenings resided.

Mrs. Alfred Speenings was at home, and very courteous in the welcome she dispensed.

CHAPTER IX.

"I ASSURE you, it is utterly impossible: two guineas a sheet is the utmost we can offer; and even that, rather as a matter of favour, than otherwise. We have so many gratis contributions, that, really, it is only out of consideration for your case, that we are induced to make any remuneration."

The individual thus addressed, was a man still young, but whose countenance was dejected, his features pinched, his frame emaciated, and his dress almost threadbare. But there was fire in the sunken eye, and pride sat on the wasted lip; the language, too, the gait, the mien, were those of higher station than he now appeared to fill.

"Mr. Trueman," said the publisher of the Review; "I beg your pardon, Mr. Forrester, I assure you, we cannot exceed the present proposal, with so many gratuitous contributors."

for " asked Forrester, haughtily.

"Not equal to yours, Sir, I allow. But—
the public, Sir, the public can't discriminate;
and if our readers are satisfied, that is enough
for us. It's hard, very hard, upon good writ—
s, but we can't help these things; the taste of
the day is bad."

"And my last contribution to your Review met with no admirers?"

"Can't say that, exactly," replied the publisher; well aware, that in consequence of Forrester's article, the sale of the Review had increased nearly twofold; "I won't say that, exactly; still, it isn't in my power to offer more, Mr. Forrester. I fill a responsible position; my fellow proprietors have placed their

Two guines I must not being the table a violent of the myself at liberty to the table at the consequence of the consequence of

I having made no reply; be but his netherlip and the blood sected; and having thrust the roll of paper into his bosom, be bowed cally as Mr. C., and stalked away.

The reached his miserable lodging; and having quieted his handlady's inquiries respecting disner, sented himself, almost without a moment's reflection, before a worm eaten, deal table, where writing implements were lying, and began to write.

His pen flew with the velocity of lightning; in fact, his occupation afforded a channel through which the torrent of excited feeling rushed furiously on. But a short half hour, and his pen was stopped; the hand, which erewhile guided it, sunk listlessly upon the table; the cheek, crimsoned with eagerness, grew pale, while tears dimmed the bright, flashing eye; for Edward suddenly reflected that his bread depended on his literary labour, and that his present occupation was not of a nature to remunerate. He looked round, and after gathering together and consulting different memoranda, began once more to write; but he wrote slowly, and with evident distaste.

To those who have been born to independence, there is always a feeling of reluctance in bartering the offspring of their mental toil for gold. Time and custom, doubtless, wear away this emotion; but, at first, it surely does exist, and strongly. And how much more, when we become hireling scribes; write, not as our own impulse dictates, but in obedience to an employer's will! Such was the nature of Edward Vavasour's occupation. That morning he had been offered an engagement for a newspaper, whose politics were adverse to his own opinions; and had rejected a proposal which

now, urged by stern necessity, he was endervouring to fulfil. The task, however, proved so repugnant to his feelings, that after composing scarcely two dozen lines, he threw his pen aside with an expression of ineffable disgust, and snatching up his hat, rushed down stairs, and into the open air. He had no definite object; unless, indeed, to endeavour to forget himself and all the miseries by which he was surrounded; and he wandered on, without heeding the direction he was following, or the lateness of the hour, until, in passing through one of the semi-aristocratic streets in the neighbourhood of Russell Square, his path was obstructed by a number of people, collected round the door of a house, whose open windows gave signs of revelry within; and while he stood, hesitating between the expediency of crossing the street or of forcing his way through the crowd, the hall door opened, and four persons issued forth, none of whom were strangers to the hapless Edward.

In the first, a young, and very lovely girl, who, evidently annoyed by the gallantry of a young man walking beside her, appeared almost to cling to the one whose arm she held, Edward recognised Blanche Vavasour; and instantly withdrawing his glance, as he would have done had the most loathsome object been before him, his eye fell on an individual more obnoxious even than Blanche; one, who had more deeply injured him—her father!—With a sickened feeling he turned hastily away, and darting across the street, recommenced his listless wandering.

"Blanche," said Mr. Vavasour, when they were driving home, "I wish most particularly that you would not treat Mr. Peter Tomlinson in the very uncivil manner, which, it appears to me, you make a point of adopting towards him."

"Papa," Blanche answered quickly, "Mr. Tomlinson is my aversion. It is impossible to describe how greatly his attentions distress and weary me; and I am anxious he should

understand that he vexes me by persevering in forcing them on me,"

"Well, you need not offend him. A sensible, judicious woman may repulse any man, if she chooses, without making an enemy of him. And may I ask, what is the meaning of your very marked predilection for Mr. Marwell? I suppose you don't wish to marry him?" said Mr. Vavasour, with much emphasis, for he thought of the marriage portion.

"Oh, no, papa."

"Then, why run the chance of irritating Tomlinson by shewing a decided preference for his rival?"

"Papa, if you would only make Mr. Tomlinson understand how obnoxious his attentions are to me ——"

"Blanche, I have expressed my disapprobation of them to his father, and having done that, I really think you may manage to put a stop to the young man's pretensions without any further interference from me. Still, be careful of offending him."

CHAPTER X.

It was considerably past midnight when Edward, once more, stood before the entrance of the squalid dwelling where he had fixed his temporary residence; and it was not until he had knocked repeatedly, that he could gain admittance. At length, the door opening slowy, his landlady appeared, evidently ruffled, and much inclined to vent her discomposure in insolent expostulation.

Without speaking, he took the candle from her hand, and ascended the stairs. He had not, however, overlooked the sinister expression of her countenance; nor, could he shut his ears against her muttered disapprobation of late hours and irregular habits; and the crimson spot which burnt upon his brow grew darker while his parched lips were drawn more forcibly together.

Having closed the door of his comfortless chamber, he flung himself into a chair, and once more endeavoured to fulfil the unpalatable task he had already found so impossible. But again the attempt proved unavailing: his thoughts refused all guidance, his fancy wandered to the past, while the trembling hand, which vainly sought to hold his pen, the failing eye that scarcely could distinguish that which lay before it, plainly proved that the disturbance under which he laboured was not simply mental.

Edward could not trace a single line; could not command a solitary sentiment: and yet, his mind was all activity, his limbs all restlessness. Sleep—repose in any form, was utterly denied to him. He never ceased to shift his posture; and as, sometimes sitting, sometimes on his feet; at one moment, thrown upon his bed; the next, hurrying up and down the

diminutive apartment, he yielded to the feverish excitement which had fastened on his frame, the vision he had lately seen flashed upon his mind. As if in galling mockery it came; as if to aggravate the bitterness with which he thought of what he had been once, what he then was, what he must soon become! Yes, in her graceful beauty, Blanche appeared before him: that beauty he had almost worshipped, whose power, even at this trying moment, his heart refused to disallow. And yet, by one of those strange contradictions incident to human nature, Edward hated Blanche.

He believed she had leagued with Mr. Vavasour; that she had been a willing coadjutor in
the destruction of his fortunes. The use to
which she had appropriated his mother's jewels
placed the fact beyond denial. This, too, in requital of his warm affection, of the disinterested offer of his hand. Oh, what ingratitude!
What avarice, what despicable meanness had
she betrayed! Was she not worthy his aver-

sion? Could he, in future, ever think of her but with contempt and indignation; or meet her without testifying his real sentiments?—It would be impossible.

Then, her partiality for Philip Marwell; her intimacy with the Tomlinsons; how much vulgarity of mind was thus evinced. She, who had refused Lord Warleigh, who had rejected him, was willing to bestow herself upon a man, whose birth was low, and whose endowments, whether of body or of mind, were scarcely common-place; and after being Harriet Brownlow's intimate companion, after mixing with the best society in London, consented to grace Mrs. Alfred Speenings' ill-conducted parties; and worse than that, suffer the attentions of her low-born brother.

Stung by jealousy, blinded by pique, Edward lashed his spirit into a perfect fever of passion against Blanche Vavasour; indeed, so absorbing was the feeling which engrossed his mind, that, for the time, it cast into the shade even the consideration of the painful difficulties which encompassed him.

It was not long, however, before his thoughts were roughly forced into another channel. Early on the following morning, his landlord knocked loudly at the door of the room, and being desired to enter, abruptly presented a bill for lodging and various articles of food furnished by him to Mr. Forrester; and charged, of course, exorbitantly high.

Edward made a movement expressive of irritation.

"Sir," said the man, surlily; "I should be sorry to put you to any inconvenience, but you've been lodging here six weeks; and—and—it isn't our custom to give credit; at least, not without very good security. So, if you'll be so good as to discharge this trifling bill, as soon as possible, I shall feel much obliged to you."

"It shall be paid." Edward answered, and

glanced towards the door; but his landlord would not understand his meaning.

"And, my wife says, Mr. Forrester, that if you would suit yourself with other apartments she shall be glad."

Edward drew himself up; his dark eye gleaming, and his whole countenance so stern and so indignant, that the landlord's spirit quailed.

"I don't mean no disrespect," he began; "but we are quiet, orderly, people; used to early hours; and—"

"Leave the room, Sir. Your bill shall be paid; and your lodgings vacant before night."

"Thank you; thank you," replied the landlord, and withdrew.

"Yes," said Edward moodily; "before sunset, this lodging shall be free; and the bill discharged. Can I discharge it? Let me see."

And he smiled with the bitterness of the

reckless and despairing; when, on comparing the slender contents of his pocket book with the amount required, he discovered the deficiency.

"There will be enough to pay all, however;" Edward continued, placing his watch on the table. "This, added to the contents of my portmanteau, will make up the balance: aye, and will bury me, perhaps. If not, the parish will. Yes, the parish will provide me with a grave."

About ten o'clock that morning, a man was seen to enter one of the most private walks of St. James's Park, and not long afterwards the report of a pistol shot reverberated through the air.

"Fool, bungler, I have missed!" Edward exclaimed, drawing a second pistol from his breast and pointing the muzzle to his mouth.

"Fool, indeed!" cried a man; who at the same time snatched the weapon from Vava-

sour's grasp. "A precious fool you are, in-

Edward glared furiously at the individual who had frustrated his iniquitous attempt: but he did not speak. "Aye, fool, I say," pursued the other: "don't look so angrily; for you are a fool, and a madman, too, to be making away with yourself in this idiotical manner; when, for anything you know, the wheel of fortune's just a going to turn. But, I see what it is. Your head's not altogether as it ought to be. You're ill. Want food, sleep-haven't been in bed all night, I take it. However, that can easily be put to rights. Come, lean on ma We'll get into a coach and drive to my hotel; and when you're fit to listen, talk over this business. Come on, come on: don't loiter; we shall have the police after us."

At another moment, Edward would have sedulously shrunk from the companionship of the man who thus addressed him: but now, the fever of his overstrained feelings was fast subsiding; and in its place, a state of languid apathy prevailed. In silence, he suffered his companion to conduct him from the Park, to seat him in a carriage, to place himself beside him, and to direct the coachman whither he should drive.

In about half an hour, they alighted at the door of an hotel. Edward was laid upon a bed and medical assistance summoned. But, before the arrival of the surgeon, he had fallen into a heavy slumber, from which he did not awake for several hours.

CHAPTER XI.

Two days subsequent to Mrs. Alfred Specings' soirée, Mr. Vavasour left home almost immediately after breakfast. Blanche, was consequently alone, when, at an unusually early hour for visiters, Mr. Peter Tomlinson was ushered into the room.

He looked full of importance and self conceit; and Blanche felt that her hour was come. Mr. Peter Tomlinson was on the point of paying her the highest compliment, it is asserted, man ever pays the gentler sex.

He did propose, and was refused—steadily and coldly. He received his fiat, however, without the slightest evidence of discomposure; beyond, perhaps, a trifling increase of his always rather rosy complexion. "Stay, Miss Vavasour, it is all very well that you should exercise your right of choice; I don't deny you have the power of doing so. But before you send me about my business in this hoity toity manner, perhaps it will be as well that you should know exactly who and what you are: for, it strikes me, that when you are better advised on that point, it's very likely you won't think so slightingly of Peter Tomlinson and his proposal," said Mr. Peter Tomlinson, concluding his respectful sally with a serious concluding laugh.

Blanche could scarcely prevent herself from dering him out of the room, so excessively dignant did she feel; and the gentleman reiving no answer, proceeded to unfold the istory of guilt and villainy already before our readers.

Blanche thought his senses had deserted him; and, as much terrified as she had been offended, approached the bell-rope with the intention of summoning assistance. With insolent familiarity he laid his hand upon her arm; and when she shrunk away with ill-disguised aversion, still followed her to the sofa, where, half fainting with alarm, she had fallen.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Vavasour. I'm not going to harm you: I'm the best friend you have, in all the world. And if you only knew what's what, instead of running away from me as if I was some vermin or another, you'd be ready to jump into my arms; that you would."

"Godfrey," murmured Blanche, "Oh, why are you not here?"

"La, Miss, why it's the best thing possible—
that he is not. What use would he be? None—
in life; now that Milly's married, too. Why—
you know, if your brother was at home, ten to—
one but he'd be for challenging Mr. Edward—
Vavasour, and that would be little use; unless,—
to be sure, he could manage to blow his brains—
out: that, certainly, would put an end to all—
this. No, it wouldn't, though. Your father'—
amenable to the law of the land; and whethe—

he's brought into a criminal court or not, just depends on us — my father and myself, I mean."

"Mr. Tomlinson, I must insist on your leaving this room. Such language I will not endure from any one."

But Mr. Tomlinson shewed no inclination to obey Miss Vavasour's behest. On the contry, he drew a chair near to the sofa, and repitulated all his former disclosures.

Blanche sat like one bereft of sense and feelg. She scarcely even seemed to breathe; and
et she did drink in the startling narrative;
id comprehend the hideous offer which conluded it.

"You see, Miss Vavasour, the whole matter rests with you. It's for you to determine whether your father shall be hanged, or whether he shall live on like a gentleman, and man of fortune. My father's in a towering passion, and swears he'll put all the papers in Edward Vavasour's hands. Of course, he will make the most of them; that's only natural."

"Where is Mr. Edward Vavasour?" asked

"In town. I don't exactly know where; but, he's somewhere in London; and his man of business, Clarkson, of Chancery Lane-my father will address himself to him-will soon ferret him out. An advertisement will do, if nothing else will."

"If your tale be true.—But no, no; it is impossible, utterly impossible."

"I dare say, you think so. I was very incredulous at first, myself; although, I've long had my suspicions that everything wasn't as it ought to be. I don't wonder it seems strange to you. It isn't pleasant to think one's father's likely to be hanged. I shouldn't altogether like such a prospect myself." Blanche clasped her slender hands together. "So, as I was saying, I was hard to be persuaded. But when my father shewed me the fragments of the Will, which he had picked up from under the gratewhy, you know, I saw there could be no mistake about the matter. "Twill go very hard

with Mr. Vavasour on such evidence. If they don't hang him, he'll be disgraced for life."

"How can you be certain that those fragments were portions of a Will, at all?"

"There's quite enough, more than enough, to prove it. Ever so many sentences in full. And then, we found a duplicate which agrees exactly; yes, Miss Vavasour, a duplicate of the old gentleman's Will. My father knew there was one; although he wasn't quite certain where. And queer enough, it fell into my hands by accident, not very long ago." Fraud would have been a juster term than accident; but Mr. Peter Tomlinson was not particularly nice in his notion of veracity. "Well, I say, I got possession of this Will; but we said nothing about it, nor ever should, if the two old ones hadn't quarrelled."

"Then, if there be a Will," inquired Blanche, "why should not Mr. Edward Vavasour proceed on that, without adverting to the

"It wouldn't do Mr. Vavasour any good, if he did. My father's in a rage with your's; and swears he'll expose him. Besides, this copy isn't altogether valid; there's just informality enough to enable the heir at law to contest it. He would not gain his cause; but he might throw the property into chancery, and keep it there, nobody can tell how long."

"But if there be any truth in what you tell me, my father, surely, would rather consent to a compromise."

"Not a bit of it. I sounded him only yesterday. For, to say the truth, Blanche Vavasour, I am partial to you; and for your sake, I should be sorry your father should be disgraced."

Mr. Tomlinson spoke with more feeling than he had previously displayed; so much so, indeed, that, struck by his earnestness, Blanche no longer ventured to dispute the truth of statements which, until now, she had refused to credit. She felt that his story, frightful as it was, might still be faithfully narrated; and full of horror and dismay, she turned on him her dark blue eyes; and hard indeed had been the heart which could resist the wistful, supplicating glance, Blanche bent on one, who, but a short time since, she had despised and spurned.

"Dear Miss Vavasour," he cried, "don't be cast down. It's a very ugly business, certainly. A monstrous awkward scrape your father's got himself into; but it's not hopeless. It can be all hushed up; and shall be, if you chuse. As yet, Edward Vavasour knows nothing about the second document; and there's no occasion that he ever should. Then, as for the rest, if you'll only say that you'll have me, I give you my word and honour that no harm shall happen to your father. The very day of our marriage, every scrap of paper that could tell against him shall be destroyed. You shall do

it yourself, love—you shall, indeed; with your own little soft white hands."

And, hurried on by his emotion, Peter seized one of those white hands, and would, no doubt, have pressed it to his lips, had not a convulsive movement on the part of Blanche repelled his raptures, and reminded him of her dislike, or rather, her aversion.

"Well, Ma'am," he said, with some pique;
"I can only say what I have said before, it
rests with you, whether your father shall be
hanged or not."

"Mr. Tomlinson," said the terrified girl, "I have not meant to hurt your feelings."

"Nor I yours. So, my dear Miss Vavasour, we understand each other. And now, to shew you how much good will I bear you, I'll offer a compromise; that is to say, I will give you a week to consider. I think I can manage my father for a week. Well, Miss Vavasour, at the end of a week, I'll call again, and hear what you have got to say upon this subject. Good

morning, Ma'am. I hope you're not likely to be indisposed. Shall I call your maid?"

"No, no, I thank you. Good morning."

They shook hands, and parted. Mr. Peter Tomlinson, fully satisfied that, in spite of all her haughtiness, Blanche Vavasour would be brought to reason, and his arms. Blanche, to ponder over all she had been hearing; to weep the burning tears of shame and degradation; and to seek, amid the turmoil of her mind, some clue by which she might direct her footsteps in a path so fraught with difficulties. Her father's life was forfeited; but she, it seemed, might interpose between him and his appalling doom. True, she might save her father's life; but how? By the entire sacrifice of her's! She might purchase his release from ignominy and disgrace—still, by what means? By herself becoming party to an act of gross injustice—by conniving at a fraud.

From either alternative, Blanche's high mind recoiled. And, as in her miserable state of

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feeling, it was utterly impossible to meet her father with any degree of calmness, she excused herself from joining him at dinner, by pleading, and with all sincerity, a severe headache.

CHAPTER XII.

"I BEG your pardon, Ma'am," said the owner of the house, entering her room about ten o'clock that evening; "I beg your pardon, Miss Vavasour, for disturbing you; but I'm afraid Mr. Vavasour's extremely ill."

Blanche raised herself from the bed upon which she had been lying.

"My father has been taken ill?"

"Don't be frightened, Ma'am. There mayn't be any thing serious the matter; only I thought it best to let you know. It struck me, when Mr. Vavasour came in this afternoon, that he was looking very pale. Mary says,

that he scarcely touched a morsel of dinner; and he went to bed quite early, and—and—"

" And what?"

"Why, you know, Mr. Vavasour sleeps over my back parlour; and as I was sitting there by myself, I heard—now don't be frightened, my dear—you know, it may be nothing serious, after all. But I really was so startled, Mr. Vavasour did groan so loud, that I thought there must be something very wrong."

Blanche scarcely heard the latter sentence. Drawing her dressing-gown round her, she flew down stairs, knocked at her father's bed-room door, and receiving no answer, entered. She found Mr. Vavasour lying on the ground in a state of perfect insensibility; while a stream of blood was gushing from his mouth.

"Quick, quick, for medical advice," cried Blanche; and assisted by the landlady, she raised the sufferer and placed him upon the bed.

A surgeon, happily, lived opposite; conse-

quently, in less than ten minutes her summons was obeyed. The case was self-evident, a blood vessel had been ruptured; aud Mr. Vavasour's life placed in the utmost peril. He recovered, however, his consciousness; and with it, hope revived: still, his condition was most precarious; and silence was enjoined, above all, perfect quiet imperatively ordered.

From the general appearance of the patient, the medical attendant conjectured, that he had lately undergone some violent shock; and that the bursting of a blood-vessel might be traced to the agitation thus induced. Any fresh excitement would, probably, cause a recurrence of the catastrophe, and lead to his dissolution. To guard her father against such a contingency, was now Blanche's principal object.

She watched beside him through that weary night; and during the long silent hours, pitiable, indeed, was the condition of a mind wrought to the very verge of frenzy by the events of the preceding day. Her fevered imagination shadowed forth each possible event of the dark future. The cell, the court of justice, and the last dread scene—all, all, were there. And she dwelt upon the hideous picture, till, despite the feelings of natural anxiety, she could not but allow, that with the risk of such disgrace impending over him, better it were, her father's life should pass away as he lay now before her.

The morning found him better. With care and quiet, he might yet live some months. Longer than that the surgeon could not promise; for the vessel which had given way was seated in the lungs; independent of which, consumption had already seriously undermined his constitution.

Exhausted by agitation and watchfulness, Blanche retired to snatch, if possible, a brief period of repose; and when, after the lapse of a few hours, she returned to her father's chamber, her amazement was considerable, on perceiving him propped up, and engaged in writing. After folding and addressing a letter to the elder Tomlinson, which he put into her hands, with a sign that she should seal and send it; Mr. Vavasour wrote a few lines on a strip of paper, which he, also, gave to Blanche. Thus ran the note—

" My dear Blanche,

"Circumstances of the most imperative nature, require your marriage with Mr. Peter Tomlinson. I deeply regret that any violence should be offered to your inclination; but your welfare is as much involved in this connexion as are my wishes; I, therefore, feel less hesitation in urging it upon you.

F. V."

"Papa," cried Blanche, "I cannot. Require any other sacrifice of me but this, and I will obey you. But, I cannot marry Mr. Tomlinson. Do not, I entreat you, ask me." Then throwing herself upon her knees, she took her father's hand in hers. He drew it from her with a convulsive jerk; and his features, only an instant since, pale even to ghastliness, were suddenly suffused with crimson. "Stay," cried the terrified girl, dreading a repetition of the accident; "stay, I will do as you wish: at least, if the miserable sacrifice be, indeed, essential. Nay, do not speak, but listen to me. Give me a fortnight, only a fortnight of delay; and if, when that is gone, you still desire this marriage, I will fulfil your wish. In the meantime, promise you will say nothing to encourage Mr. Tomlinson. Father, are you satisfied? Will you grant my request?"

Mr. Vavasour did appear content. He smiled, and drawing her feebly towards him, with an appearance of affection, embraced the child, he had shewn himself so ready to immolate.

Blanche shrunk with loathing from the endearments of a parent she could neither reverence nor love; and hastily returning to her own apartment, she knelt before her heavenly, as she had done before her earthly father, and offered up a prayer, wild and incoherent, but fraught with all the energy of one hopeless of mortal help. In the language almost of delirium, she implored, that He, who had declared himself the Father of the fatherless, would now vouchsafe to hear and succour her; to strengthen and direct her.

Then, in pursuance of a project she had formed in the moment of anguish which preceded her pledging herself to do her father's bidding, she wrote a few lines to Edward Vavasour, entreating an immediate interview. She enclosed the note in one to Mr. Clarkson, accompanied with a request that he would forward it to Edward, and his reply to her, with as little delay as possible.

The answer came quickly. Full of hope, Blanche tore it open and read—

[&]quot;Mr. Edward Vavasour presents his com-

pliments to Miss Vavasour, and feeling that the interview she desires can be productive of nothing but pain to both parties, trusts she will withdraw her requirement."

"Mrs. Williams," said Blanche to her landlady, "I must tax your good nature once more; by asking you to accompany me to Mr. Clarkson's house."

Mrs. Williams, all kind heartedness, assented; and, on the following morning, at the same hour as formerly, Blanche again found herself in the presence of this, to her, most important personage.

He received his trembling applicant with rather more cordiality than on her previous visit: this indication of friendship, however, vanished on his being made aware of the exact nature of her present supplication. She was anxious to see Mr. Edward Vavasour, and Mr. Clarkson was the only medium of accomplishing her, as he deemed, very unseemly wish.

"My dear young lady," he began, "what you ask of me, is utterly impossible; not to be thought of. I, further a meeting between you and Mr. Edward Vavasour? Assist you in doing what appears to me highly indecorous? Impossible! What do you take me for?"

"I know you to be kind hearted, willing to help the wretched, those who have no other earthly friends. And such, alas, am I."

"Are you an orphan, Miss Vavasour? Have you no relations? No natural friend or adviser to whom you might apply?"

"I have a father;" Blanche answered, and she blushed as she spoke the word. "I have a father; but he is ill, perhaps dying; and it is on his account, that I now intreat your pity and kind offices."

" Humph-your father's ill, is he?"

"Dying!" Blanche replied.

"Then, have you no other relations? No brothers? The old lady, Miss Bransby, what's become of her?" In answer, Blanche explained the peculiar circumstances of her family.

"It's very extraordinary, very extraordinary, indeed," said Mr. Clarkson, divided between the strong interest she had awakened in his heart, and annoyance at the nature of her application. "Hang me, if I know what to say about it. Have you, at any rate, no friends? For you must be aware, that for a lady of your age and appearance, to be running after a young man, is—is, really, not at all the thing. And as the father of a family, I cannot sanction it."

"I know, I know, the course I am pursuing must appear ambiguous; but, alas, I am so singularly situated, that I can see no other. And," she added, in a hollow tone, "life, respectability, all, all, depend upon my seeing Edward Vavasour."

"Bless my heart! But this appears a very odd sort of business."

"I have a disclosure to make, which can be made to none but Mr. Vavasour." "Can't you write? I would send your letter, as I did your last."

Blanche shook her head.

"No, I must speak."

"And, life is, you say, at stake?"

"Indeed it is. Life, and much more than life. Still, could I only speak ten words to Mr. Vavasour,—"

"I'm sure, I don't know what to say about it. You can't go to his lodgings."

"Oh no. I wish to see him here."

"No, that won't do. Whatever I may do to help you, I can't lend myself to your meeting Mr. Vavasour in my house; bad example for my daughters; it wouldn't answer at all. We must think of something else. I'll tell you what, Miss Vavasour; this gentleman has sent word that he wishes to consult me on some point of law, and purposes calling at our office in Chancery Lane, on Tuesday morning next, somewhere about eleven o'clock; now if you

should also happen to have business to transact, and chance to be there at the same time as Mr. Vavasour, it's not unlikely you might meet, you know."

"Thank you;" cried Blanche; "thank you; my dear, dear, Mr. Clarkson."

"Oh, it's not my doing. Only chance, you know." He answered, with a half smile. "Remember, you ask for me; desire to be shewn into my private room. I don't like being mixed up with things of this nature. At the same time, however, it's not my doing; all accident, I say, your both choosing the same hour. Good morning, Ma'am. No thanks, no thanks; I tell you, I've nothing to do in the matter. Good morning. Eleven o'clock next Tuesday morning. Be sure you ask for my private room. And be very particular, or they'll be shewing you into the wrong place. Eleven o'clock; don't be behind time. He is always punctual."

Blanche assured Mr. Clarkson that she would be both exact and circumspect: and then retired from his house with a far lighter heart than she had entered it.

ing her seat in the crazy vehicle destined to convey them to Mr. Clarkson's office, "my head is so bewildered with all this frightful story, that I can scarcely realise a single circumstance; nor do I yet fully apprehend your intention respecting Mr. Vavasour. What is it you mean to do?"

"To disclose every thing to Edward; and then throw myself, or rather, I should say, my father, upon his generosity and forbearance. Nay, my dear friend, the scheme is not so very wild as it appears to you; indeed, it is not. My poor father's state of health is such, that a few months must finish his sufferings; and then the property will be Edward's without any dispute on our sides."

- " Can you insure that?"
- "After my father's death, the right of contesting the Will rests with my brother, as heir at law: I engage that he shall not dispute it; and do you, for a moment suppose, that Godfrey will refuse to ratify any engagement which, under

our circumstances, I may contract on his behalf? Oh! do not say you do. Do not say any thing to damp my courage; for indeed, indeed, dear friend, now that the time is drawing near, I feel as if I shall turn coward, and give away this only chance of saving my unhappy father from an ignominious death; and we, his wretched children, from disgrace and infamy."

Mrs. Turner did not continue to express her doubts: on the contrary, she endeavoured to encourage Blanche, and to argue down her apprehensions. Still, when they reached their journey's termination—when they found themselves the only occupiers of a room so dark and sombre, that it looked as if no cheerfulness nor sunbeam ever entered there; so close and overcoming, that the very power of breathing seemed almost denied—Blanche felt herself grow sick at heart, and faint in spirit.

"Alas!" she whispered, "I shall never find courage to address him. Mrs. Turner—dear

Mrs. Turner, you must speak for me. You know the particulars of this terrible transaction. You must relate them; I feel I never shall have nerve to do it: already, I am almost fainting!"

With some difficulty, Mrs. Turner threw up the sash. Blanche removed her bonnet, and seated near the window, inhaled an atmosphere, in truth, more fog and smoke than the pure air of heaven."

"If I could only weep; tears would so much relieve me. Hist! He is coming—oh, I dare not meet him!" And she shrunk behind her companion.

The door opening, Edward entered, and advanced a few paces; until perceiving that the room was already occupied, he was on the point of leaving it; when Mrs. Turner spoke, and hearing himself addressed by name, he turned, and recognised Miss Vavasour.

An expression of surprise, not unmingled with vexation, burst from him: and Blanche, who had risen, sunk again on the window-seat, without uttering a single syllable.

Mrs. Turner felt herself called upon to interpose. She broke the ice at once, by informing Mr. Vavasour, that she and Blanche were there as petitioners to him.

Edward drew himself up.

"After the note I had the honour of writing in reply to yours," he said, addressing Blanche, "I should scarcely have imagined, you would have persisted in seeking an interview with me."

Blanche's spirit rose.

"Hear me, Mr. Vavasour;" she said, "hear what I have to tell you, and then you will, perhaps, experience less surprise at my intrusive perseverance." Then, after pausing for a moment, the excited girl commenced a recital, so eminently painful, that nothing but the energy springing from despair could have enabled her to make, and sustain, the effort.

She spoke as one who forces natural feeling. Her voice was, at times, a hollow whisper; at others, it became a shriek; her hands were clasped, her knees crushed fast together; and her complexion, pale as the drifted snow, until the blush of shame sent the blood rushing to her brow, and crimsoned every feature; her eyes were fastened on the ground, her head bent forward.

In all respects, Blanche Vavasour presented a 'picture painful to behold; and yet replete with beauty. An image which had won its way to most men's hearts. But Edward viewed her with a jaundiced eye. Not as she was, in truth, a noble-minded being, full of high principle and womanly devotedness; but as a scheming, artful, willing coadjutor in all her father's villainy. Even then, she stood before him, he believed, not in reality the intercessor for her father's life, and trusting to his generosity; but, relying on his former admiration, she endeavoured to shield herself from

degradation, and her vile parent from the consequences of his crime.

It was thus, that blinded by pique and jealousy, Edward misjudged the frank, confiding creature who had thrown herself upon his manliness and magnanimity. There was, besides, another circumstance militating against the success of Blanche's undertaking. He was already in possession of the facts she now narrated; he knew that Mr. Vavasour had been apprised of this; her disclosure, therefore, lost its value; and believing her present application the consequence of a concerted scheme, he resolutely shut his heart against the wretched girl.

"Miss Vavasour," he said coldly, when she had brought her recital to a close; "I regret that you should have ventured on this step; for it pains me to refuse—"

"Refuse!" shrieked Blanche. "Surely you will not, you cannot, refuse my prayer. Oh! consider, consider, I entreat you, all the consequences of your present course. My father's banishment; perhaps, his death—I will not say upon the scaffold; for there, he will not live to go—still, his death. My ignominy; Godfrey's!—Mr. Vavasour, if it be only for the name we alike bear, pause before you inflict this degradation on your house."

Edward smiled scornfully.

"My name has not been always Vavasour. I have been known as Mr. Forrester, and as such, I have been treated with contempt."

Blanche looked wistfully at Edward: so great was her bewilderment of mind that she could not instantly discern his meaning.

"However," he pursued, "it matters little now. The tables are changed; I am Edward Vavasour again, and those, who formerly disdained and mortified me, must be prepared to meet the consequences of their pride."

"Mr. Vavasour," cried Blanche, suddenly seizing the meaning of his allusion, "I once saw you under nearly similar circumstances conduct yourself as I did when we met in Essex. I believed, in following your track, I could not greatly err; if my judgment deceived me, I can only ask your pardon."

"Yes, yes," said Edward, "now, of course, you can be all humility, all sweetness, all gentleness and condescension."

" Mr. Vavasour," interrupted Mrs. Turner, "this is scarcely manly."

Edward started; the truth of her remark struck home upon a heart seared by misfortune and the world's ill usage; yet, even now, not utterly devoid of kindly feeling.

"Your conduct is not manly. You are trampling on the fallen—that fallen one a woman, and who has cast herself upon your generosity."

"Nay," exclaimed Blanche, her spirit once more rising, "say nothing. Let Edward Vavasour disgrace himself; it is better that he should—aye, better for me. Let him disgrace himself. I will supplicate no more; the time is past for supplication; henceforth, I will require -yes, require. For the sake of him whose life I saved; of that man, who was as a father to you, Mr. Vavasour, I require you to desist."

"Miss Vavasour, your plea is null. That man was not my father; nor did he play a father's part by me."

"Then listen, once again. In the name of our Common Saviour, I bid you pause; He, who enjoined us to forgive, even to love, those who have wronged us. Dare you refuse the adjuration? Remember, it is written, 'he shall have judgment without mercy, who shews no mercy.' And what is it, I ask? A trifling exercise of forbearance, a short delay in the recovery of your property: no actual sacrifice; you shall not lose one farthing of that wealth, you seek so eagerly. You know my father's habits, and can guess how little of the annual rental he expends; and even that little shall be all refunded; Godfrey shall pay all; or, if he cannot, I will labour, yes, every hour of my

life, I will devote to the repayment of the debt."

At first, Blanche spoke with energy, almost vehemence; but latterly, exhausted with the effort, her strength forsook her, and the last word was little better than a sob. Gentle feelings were astir in Edward's bosom; but still, stung by the memory of his wrongs, he would not listen to their prompting; and assuming an appearance of sternness, he inquired of Mrs. Turner,

"How does it happen, that in an arrangement which so intimately regards Mr. Vavasour, himself, his name is not mentioned? Why is there no pledge from him; or rather, why does he not profess his willingness to resign at once his unjustly acquired wealth?"

" My father knows nothing of my present application," Blanche answered.

" Mr. Vavasour knows nothing of you being here?"

- "Nothing. On my head alone rests all the folly, all the responsibility, of an attempt both ill-advised and fruitless," Blanche said, with a degree of bitterness that further irritated Edward.
- "Miss Vavasour, when I knew you formerly, I scarcely thought you would have stooped to such a step as this."
- "Nor I," she answered, proudly. "But which of us shall calculate on what we shall, or shall not, do? As our circumstances alter, so do we; and, thus, the proud become the abject and abased."
- "And your father, really, is not privy to your coming here?"
 - " I have already answered you."
- "I grieve to hear it. Yes, Blanche Vavasour, for the sake of all that I once felt for you, I regret to think that so singular, so unusual a proceeding, should have emanated from yourself."
- " Mr. Vavasour, I threw myself upon your

honour; I believed you to be, at least, a gen-

"Yes. You believed me a man of honour, a gentleman; and more than that, Miss Vavasour, you reckoned me your captive, you enslaved; and, therefore, your ready dupe. You thought all this, I say. But you have been mistaken. The very circumstance upon which you rested your security, has marred your scheme. Had you known human nature better, it would have occurred to you, that a rejected lover was the very last man in the whole world likely to prove a willing auditor. Miss Vavasour, you have miscalculated; the affection I once bore you has long ago given place to feelings of a very different nature."

Blanche had never for a moment supposed that Edward would impute such motives to her; still less, that he would openly charge her with indelicacy; and her indignation, consequently, knew no bounds. She rose suddenly, and fixing her flashing eyes on him, stood for a

few seconds, the very impersonation of anger, pride and scorn.

But what had she to do with pride? She—a felon's daughter; and all but pledged to wed a man whose parents had been menials. Blanche recalled her fallen, her degraded state; and all her indignation vanished before the sense of deep humiliation. Placing her hands before her face, she again sat, or rather crouched, beside the only being, who, at that moment, appeared to feel for her.

Once more did Edward's heart upbraid him for the harshness he was manifesting. But still, infatuated by passion, he steeled himself against the rebuke. He had resolved that Blanche should not be victor, and to that resolution he would stubbornly adhere. But the struggle was severe; and, fearful of betraying the exact nature of his feelings, he turned and walked away.

"My dear child," whispered Mrs. Turner, "there appears little use in prolonging this interview. Had we not better return home?" "Yes, in a minute. I cannot stand just now; but in a minute, I shall be well, quite well," Blanche answered, faintly, whilst her head reclined against the window frame, and her eyelids fell.

Edward returned; and after gazing on her for a few seconds, said, with great abruptness:

"You are much changed, Miss Vavasour."

"Yes; sorrow changes; and mine has been a portion of great sadness. So sorrowful, indeed, that did you know, could you but understand, half the misery I have been subject to; you, even you, would scarcely increase the heavy burden which soon will crush me altogether."

Edward's brow contracted.

"When does your brother return?" was his next question; prompted, Blanche fancied, by the spirit of mercenary calculation, and she framed her reply accordingly.

"It was not on that account, I asked," he answered. And the hesitating tone of voice in which he spoke, imparted hope to Blanche.

She looked earnestly towards him, and the violent working of his features strengthened the impression. A sharp conflict was clearly carrying on within. The good and evil principle wrestled together; still, which would conquer, it was impossible to guess; with such rapidity the varying passions appeared to sweep across his mind. He walked a few paces; then, forcing his countenance into stern composure, he again approached Miss Vavasour; and in a clear, cold, voice, said:

" I will write."

She clasped her hands together. In those three words, she heard the knell of every hopeful expectation, the entire failure of her painful mission. Edward would write that which he had no longer heart to speak.

She clasped her hands, looked tearfully, upbraidingly, upon him, then fainted at his feet.

When partially restored to consciousness, Blanche became aware that several people stood grouped around her; that she was assisted to the carriage which had conveyed her to Mr. Clarkson's office, and driven home. But she could scarcely distinguish the words addressed to her, or the individual who spoke. She saw figures moving hither and thither, but without the power of distinctly recognising any one. In a word, her mind became a perfect chaos; her faculties were in a state of torpor, from which she had no longer strength to rally them.

A night of feverish delirium followed; and it was long before she recovered the effect of her distressing interview.

" Oh, Mrs. Turner, had the blow come from any hand but his !"

Such was Blanche's address, on the ensuing day, to the kind friend who had watched her through the long night, and was still sitting by her bedside.

" My dearest child, you must not agitate your mind with these considerations; dismis

the subject from your thoughts, entirely; you are too weak, as yet, to dwell upon the theme; forget all that passed yesterday."

- " Forget it, Mrs. Turner!"
- "Well, if you cannot put the remembrance from your mind, look on the bright side of the picture. Think only of the victory you gained. Be thankful that your suit prospered; and that, through your agency, your father's last hours will be spent in peace."
- "But it is not so. Edward did not accede to my request. On the contrary, he spurned me;—yes, he spurned me from him."
- "Nay, dearest Blanche; Mr. Vavasour has granted your petition. While you were still insensible, he bade me assure you of his willingness to meet your wishes; and Mr. Clarkson has been here this morning to confirm the good news."
- "Blessed be God for all his mercies. But the fragments of the former Will, and that dreadful man, Tomlinson, what will be done about him?"

"Mr. Edward Vavasour has, I believe, the remaining portions of the Will in his possession; and, of course, he will destroy them. With regard to Tomlinson, you need be under no anxiety; he will be easily silenced, now that he has nothing to gain by propagating his knowledge of this unfortunate affair. Indeed, as in some respects, he has been your poor father's accomplice, he would bring disgrace upon himself by drawing attention to the circumstances. There is, therefore, little to apprehend from him. So you may set your mind at ease, dear Blanche; all will be well."

"Blessed be God for all his mercies," again, Blanche murmured. "And oh, may it be his holy will that the severe trial of yesterday may not be lost on me. Pray for me, dearest friend," she added, taking Mrs. Turner's hand in hers, "pray for me, and for Edward, also; ask that each of us may be made to turn from idols. The world is Edward's idol—he was mine! But it is over now. The spell which

bound me is dissolved; and he, who threw that fatal spell upon me, stands disclosed in his own dark colours, not in those bright, gorgeous tints with which my folly decked him."

CHAPTER XIV.

"My dear Blanche," said Mrs. Turner, a few days afterwards, "would it not be as well that you should write a line of thanks to Mr. Edward Vavasour ———"

"Write, and thank Mr. Vavasour!"

"Yes, my dear child. At your request, he has withdrawn his suit against your father; and indeed, I think, that the forbearance thus displayed, deserves some acknowledgment from you."

"Mrs. Turner, I cannot write to Edward Vavasour," said Blanche; her colour rising at the very thought. "Pray, pray, remember his insulting conduct during that interview."

"It has not escaped my mind."

"And you would have me open a correspondence with the man who has so treated me; demean myself more than I have already done?"

"My dear, I remember all that occurred at Mr. Clarkson's; I remember, likewise, that at the time, I was perhaps more filled with indignation than even you, yourself. But I have since reflected, that however blameable Mr. Vavasour was on that occasion, he is not without some claim on your forbearance. There were many palliating circumstances; and we must make allowance for the provocation he has received. Besides, he has been tried, severely tried."

"Then should he not have learnt to sympathize with others equally unfortunate, instead of insulting them?"

"And so he will, one day. The aptitude of sympathising with others is, in fact, one of the appointed ends for which we any of us suffer: we are afflicted, that we may learn how to succour the afflicted. Such is the purpose of misfortune; and yet, at first, trial sometimes seems to harden rather than refine the character. Affliction is, as truly described in holy writ, a furnace which does eventually purify; but which at first, brings into sight only the dross and the impurity. Edward Vavasour is just now undergoing this part of the process; by and bye, the better portion will appear. And, even at present, I much mistake, if his recollection of that painful conversation is not infinitely more distressing than your own."

- "I can scarcely think it."
- "If you wish to bring conviction to his mind, write, and thank him."
 - "I cannot, Mrs. Turner."
- "A few words will be sufficient;" said Mrs. Turner, placing writing materials before Blanche.

The latter took the pen with the air of a person weary of argument; not of one whose judgment is convinced; and after a minute's consideration, wrote—

"Blanche Vavasour is grateful."

"My dear," urged Mrs. Turner, "is not that a very singular style of addressing Mr. Vavasour? So laconic!"

"I cannot write in any other." Blanche answered, with all the pettish waywardness of recent illness; and Mrs. Turner, seeing that a prolonged altercation would be both unavailing and injurious, offered no further opposition; and the note was sent.

Edward's hand trembled as he broke the seal. Already, he had reproached himself, and not lightly, for the rough, unfeeling, manner he had adopted towards Blanche during their interview. Aware of her illness, of which he justly judged himself the cause; informed, also, through Mr. Clarkson, of several circumstances evidential of her opposition rather than her conjunction with her father, the angry feelings and unjust suspicions he had harboured, were changed for pity and remorse. And now, that

he read those few short words traced by a hand still weak and faltering, little suspecting that she wrote in scorn and irony, his impulse led him to seek her presence; and snatching up his hat, he walked impetuously towards Warwick Street.

But, when opposite the house, and in the very act of crossing the street, the appearance at the window of a man wearing the dress and semblance of an invalid, reminded Edward that Blanche was not the only inmate of that apartment; and he paused. The next moment he asked himself the possible result of a renewed acquaintance with a woman, who had once held all his senses captive, and whose actual position was not ill calculated to re-animate his former passion. Would there be wisdom in seeking her society? Prudence said—no. And, perhaps, Edward's dislike for Mr. Vavasour strengthened the admonition.

Prudence is sometimes wrong; she was, in this particular instance. Had Edward asked

to be admitted, his reception from Miss Vavasour would have been calculated rather to repress than cherish feelings of a gentle nature; for Blanche was still excessively displeased. In spite of many efforts to regard that mortifying scene with Christian-like equanimity; as yet, she never did recur to it without a burning cheek, and eye which flashed with indignation. Still, when Edward's card was put into her hand, when she was informed that the attention was especially for her; that his inquiries for her health had been most minute; his expressions of regret and interest manifold and strong; some little portion of that indignation wore away, and Blanche began to think that, perhaps, he had not wilfully insulted her. That the obnoxious language he had used was, at least, unpremeditated; and the accusation so derogatory to her maiden dignity, not, after all, his real impression. At all events, if he had been guilty of intemperance, he clearly regretted his misconduct, and was anxious to offer any reparation in his power. That this visit might be regarded in the light of an apology; an advance towards a renewal of their former intimacy, was undeniable; and although a written excuse would have been more satisfactory, from such a mind as his, and under his peculiar circumstances, any thing beyond his present overture might not be expected.

It was thus Blanche reasoned. And although she could not bring herself to forgive Edward Vavasour entirely, she became far less exasperated against him; and even half determined that, should he chance to call again, and gain admittance, she would receive him with moderate cordiality. The address upon the card, a lodging in one of the inferior streets in the metropolis, was not without its influence on Miss Vavasour; for, as her eye rested on the handwriting, could she forget that it was from consideration towards her, he still endured a life of comparative privation?

CHAPTER XV.

"You desired I would write frequently, my dear Mrs. Turner, yet three months have elapsed since you were here, and I have written only once; not because I have not often thought of you and wished for you, and even in imagination held kind intercourse with you; but, because, my existence has been so monotonous, it furnished no topic worth communicating; so melancholy, that I have been loathe to add another to your many sources of anxiety and grief. Perhaps, I have been idle, likewise; sorrow appears to me to incline terribly to indolence.—But a change is likely to take place in our uniform life; and I hasten to apprise

you of it. My father, although I fear weaker than when you left us, has latterly been seized with a violent desire for change; and his restlessness is such, that Dr. M. avers, that to oppose the wish would probably occasion more injury than he risks from the fatigue inevitable upon travelling. He says, also, that change of air may induce temporary relief. In passing this opinion, Dr. M., in common with myself, believed the neighbourhood of London would prove the utmost limits of the journey meditated by my father; and I will not deny, that I acceded the more readily from my own, I may say, almost craving for country air. But, dear Mrs. Turner, imagine my consternation on learning that it is to Newstoke Priors my poor father intends, or rather I should say, wishes, to remove. I reasoned long against this unhappy fancy; for the distance (upwards of a hundred miles) renders the undertaking one of great imprudence, almost madness, to an invalid reduced to nearly the last stage of debility;

and, from motives you will easily appreciate, Newstoke Priors is the last place in England I should have chosen for our residence.

"But my arguments were useless; indeed, they appeared to fix my father in his resolution. I lament to say, that early next week we are to set out; Wednesday, I believe, will be the day. Think of us then, dearest Mrs. Turner, let your warmest prayers be mine; for, in truth, an anxious undertaking lies before me; the more anxious, perhaps, because my father does not dream of danger; and it is scarcely possible to render him aware of his real state. On the contrary, he is in high spirits, and reckoning confidently on recovery, laughs at my uneasiness. All that I have been able to gain is the exchange of a public for a private carriage; and, after much entreaty, he has suffered me to engage the sister of our kind landlady, as nurse and waiting maid. Farewell, dearest friend. I will write when we reach Newstoke Priors. Let me find a letter there from you; and rest assured of my continued grateful affection.

" BLANCHE VAVASOUR.

"Warwick Street, September 15th."

"I heard not long ago from Harriet Greville, now a widow, and still in very delicate health. She is residing in seclusion in the Isle of Wight. I fancy her marriage proved anything but happy."

"Look Blanche," said Mr. Vavasour, on the afternoon of the day anterior to that on which they were to leave London; "just see how awkwardly that careless fellow has put up these bottles. Here's one cracked all across; and as I'm a living man half the laudanum has oozed out."

"The phials have been very badly packed, certainly. But how fortunate that the accident happened here instead of on the road, where we could not so easily have repaired Mr. Corbyn's carelessness."

"Carelessness. Carelessness, indeed! I'm not at all sure that it was carelessness; much more likely to have been done on purpose. Mighty convenient for Mr. Corbyn to sell two bottles of laudanum instead of one. However, he'll be disappointed, I won't pay a farthing for that phial, and there's quite laudanum enough left to serve me for a fortnight; and you'll be so good, therefore, as to see that the item's deducted from the bill."

"You mean the phial?" said Blanche in a doubtful tone.

"Yes; phial and laudanum, too. The bottle was broken and the laudanum spilt, and you don't suppose that I shall be fool enough to pay for articles I have never received."

"Papa, I am very much afraid that the bill is already discharged. Monford asked leave to go out this afternoon, and as she was to pass near Corbyn's I desired her to call and pay the bill."

"Then, when Mrs. Monford comes in, you will just desire her to step back again and recover the money."

"Will not that be very awkward?"

"Not at all. But if you find it awkward, I hope it will be a lesson to you, Blanche, never again to pay for things you have not received," Mr. Vavasour answered, at the same time, emptying the remaining contents of the broken phial into a tumbler, which, with other glasses, stood upon the table where they had been dining.

"Papa, ought you not to try and sleep a little."

"That laudanum must be put into a clean bottle."

"When Monford comes in-"

"When Monford comes in—when Monford comes in," replied Mr. Vavasour mimicing his daughter; till, suddenly reflecting, that in consequence of the shopman's carelessness he should get half a bottle of laudanum gratis, his

humour changed; and he added quite good temperedly, "Sleep, sleep? why, yes; I am beginning to feel tired; shan't be sorry to lie down and get a nap. But you must come and read to me, or I shan't be able to forget that fellow's carelessness. Give me you arm, child, how weak I feel this afternoon."

Blanche seated herself by the bed-side, and before half an hour had elapsed, saw her father fast asleep.

A knock at the door.

"Please, Miss," said the servant of the house, to Blanche, who had answered the summons, "there's a gentleman wants to speak to you."

"I can see no one. Don't admit him, on any account."

"Please, Miss, he's in the drawing-room. I'm very sorry, I'm sure, as you don't wish to see nobody; but he was so very *premtry*, he wouldn't listen to nothing I could say. I told him, you and Mr. Vavasour was too ill to see

company. But he wouldn't take no denial, so I let him come up stairs, and he's waiting in the drawing-room."

"What name did he give?"

"He didn't give no name whatever; and he's a stranger to me," said the girl, who had held her situation only a few days.

Blanche closed the door she had been holding in her hand, but at the threshold of the adjoining room, she paused. Who was this very peremptory individual? Could it, possibly be, Edward Vavasour?

She entered the apartment, and found the elder Mr. Tomlinson.

"Well, Miss Vavasour," he said, advancing towards her with his customary vulgar freedom, "how's papa? Pretty well, I hope. Needn't inquire after your health; those rosy cheeks speak for themselves. Never saw you looking better in all my life. Glad of it, Miss Vavasour, glad to see you looking so charming; for, you know, that where a lady's face is her

fortune—but, how's papa—how's Mr. Vavasour?" he added, checked by the displeasure Blanche's countenance displayed.

- "My father is exceedingly unwell."
- "Sorry to hear it, Miss Vavasour. Hope, though, that he's not worse than ordinary."
- "My father is unusually unwell this afternoon."
- "Vastly unlucky—vastly unlucky, indeed; because, you see, Miss Vavasour, there's a little business matter that I must speak to him about."
- "Mr. Vavasour can see no one," said Blanche, determinately.
- "Oh, yes, he'll see me—he'll see me. I shan't detain him above ten minutes."
 - "No, Mr. Tomlinson; it is impossible."
- "Where is your father? Not gone out, I take it?"
- "He is sleeping, and must on no account be disturbed."
 - "That's his room, I believe?" said Tom-

linson glancing towards the door that communicated with Vavasour's sleeping-apartment.

"My father cannot see you. He must husband all the little strength he has, for we leave town to-morrow."

"And so do I. Going out of town myself to-morrow. Curious enough, isn't it?" Tomlinson answered, and then laughed loudly; evidently, with the intention of awakening the sick man.

"Mr. Tomlinson, cannot you write? We expect to reach Newstoke Priors during the week; and when recovered from the fatigue of travelling, my father will give your letter all attention."

"I dare say he would, Ma'am; but, unluckily, the little job I want to speak to Vavasour about, isn't exactly the thing to put on paper. And, as it seems, we are both going out of town, and mayn't meet again in a hurry, there is a greater reason for my seeing your papa at once; so, you'll be so good as to tell him that I'm here, and shall be glad to speak with him. Sorry to disturb him; but I'm engaged to dine with my daughter at Peckham, and havn't a minute to lose. By Jove," he continued, looking at his watch, "it's five-and-twenty minutes after four now. Look sharp, will you?—or stay, I'll step into your father's room, and speak to him without any further ceremony."

And Tomlinson walked towards the door.

Blanche, who had too good reason to dread the consequence of collision between her father and Tomlinson, darted forward, and placing herself in front of the intruder, said, with a degree of boldness which, for a moment, rebuked him,

"Mr. Tomlinson, you cannot, shall not, enter that apartment."

Mr. Tomlinson's assurance did not long abandon him.

"Come, come," he answered, "this won't do; it's no use making all this piece of work must. Let me through, then, without any mance add. Why," Tomlinson pursued, observing that Blanche continued stationary, "I protest you're quite an Amazon. Pity you didn't go to sen along with Mr. Godfrey! You'd have done famously before the mast; have made as bold a Jack tar as any in the service. Upon my life, Ma'am, you surprise me!"

Blanche's spirit was roused, and her determination of defeating his purpose strengthened by Tumlinson's increasing insolence.

"Mr. Tomlinson, whether you are surprised or not, is of far less consequence to me than the preservation of my father's health, or, perhaps, I should rather say his life. Therefore, I must insist on your relinquishing your intention of intruding into his room."

"Come, come," urged Tomlinson, drawing so near to Blanche, that she could almost feel his breath upon her cheek, "no more nonsense; 'twont do with me. I'm not the sort of man to be bullied by a girl like you. Let me pass, I say; or, if you like it better, go and tell your father that I want to see him."

"What is the nature of your business? Cannot I mention it to my father after we reach Newstoke Priors, when, I trust, he will be better able to listen to such matters than he is now?"

"The nature of my business? Tell you what I want with Mr. Vavasour? No, no, Miss; can't possibly do that; 'tisn't my custom to let ladies into my secrets. Not even Mrs. Tomlinson; although she's as sensible a woman as any you'd meet with, and can keep a secret with any body. But you're all apt to tittle-tattle."

"In this case, Mr. Tomlinson, there is little danger of indiscretion on my part."

"Well, I believe that's true enough. For your own sake, I dare say you would contrive to keep a quiet tongue between your teeth. So, perhaps, there will be no great harm in telling you."

- "Indeed, you may rely upon my secrecy."
- "Well then, it's about that Will your father thought proper to destroy."
 - "What of that?" gasped Blanche.
- "No, not exactly about the Will. It's some money, some money, Mr. Vavasour agreed to advance me, and which I shall be glad to have in a day or two. Peter's got himself into a scrape gambling. And a speculation young Speenings and I entered into hasn't turned out quite so prosperous as we expected; and—and,—but there's no use telling you all this; it's enough for you to know that I want a couple of thousand pounds."
 - "Two thousand pounds?"
- "Yes, Miss Vavasour, two thousand pounds. I've a payment to make before the end of the month of double that sum; so there's no time to lose; and you'll agree, it wasn't wonderful I was rather imperative about seeing Mr. Vavasour."
 - "But why should he advance the money?"
 - "Oh, it's an old arrangement. Now, don't

be asking foolish questions; better step in at once and speak to Mr. Vavasour."

- "Mr. Tomlinson, you surely know enough of our family affairs to be perfectly aware that my father has not the power of raising two thousand pounds."
- "Isn't he the owner of the Newstoke property?"
 - " By no means."
- "He's the nominal owner, at any rate. The rents pass through his hands, full fifteen thousand a year. What harm can it do him to accommodate me with a couple?"
- "My father's tenure of that property can only be considered in light of trust. He must repay——"
- "Yes, yes; I know all that; but it makes no difference, none in the world to me. This money I must have, and Frederic Vavasour must find means of raising it. And listen, young lady, if he does not, it will be all the worse for him."
 - " What do you mean?"

- "Why, that the story of that pretty little performance of his shall go from one end of the country to the other."
- "You forget that, in betraying my father, you implicate yourself, Mr. Tomlinson. If he be guilty, you are not innocent; you were his accomplice; at all events, you connived at his unhappy misdemeanour."
 - " Yes, Miss, perhaps I did."
- "Then, be wise, and maintain the secrety as essential to you as to him."
- "So I will, to be sure. I'll keep the matter snug till I'm out of harm's way, safe in America; and then, I swear as I'm a living man, there isn't a newspaper that shan't be full of it."

Blanche's courage quailed. She was well aware that, with such a man as Tomlinson, this would be no empty threat; still, she resolved to make one more effort to prevent the perilous interview.

"Well, Miss Vavasour, which do you chuse? To let me and your father settle this business quietly, or have the whole family disgraced? Come, speak, I can't be waiting here all day."

- " I cannot suffer you to enter that room."
- "Then you're a ---"
- "Listen to me. I cannot suffer you to see my father; but I will use every effort to place the money in your hands; your demand is perfectly exorbitant; at the same time, the consequences you threaten are so dreadful that—that—if it be possible, the money shall be paid."

"Yes, yes, Miss Vavasour, the money shall be paid; in fact, it must; but how?"

"By trusting to my influence with my father. Even for your own sake, such is your wisest policy; for, if you force an interview injurious in its consequences, it will be almost impossible not to betray, both to the physician and the owner of the house, a great deal that all parties must wish to conceal."

"As to there being any blow up, I'll take the chance of it, for the money I must have." "And what if your intemperance should hurry my poor father to his grave? His life hangs on a thread, the slightest agitation may cause a rupture of that blood vessel.

"Why, to be sure, if Vavasour should tip off before he's raised the wind it would be rather inconvenient; and irritation's always bad for invalids. But how else am I to get the money?"

"I will procure it for you," Blanche said, steadily.

Tomlinson spent a short period in thought; then raising his head, answered,

"Don't like this way of doing business; too much out of the common. However, as I don't desire to put your father to any unnecessary inconvenience, I'll take you at your word; only, remember, I want the cash immediately."

" You shall have it."

"If she doesn't send it, I can easily run down to Newstoke and have at the old gentleman," Tomlinson muttered between his teeth. Then addressing Blanche, "A draft on Hammersleys made out to me, William Tomlinson, and next week, remember, next week——"

"Yes, yes."

"And take care there's no shuffling, no going back from the agreement; your father disappointed me once, and sorry enough he was afterwards for what he'd done; so take you care, for William Tomlinson's not the man to be trifled with. And I'll tell you what, if the old gentleman there should be restive, there's Edward Vavasour, you'd better try him; he used to be a beau of yours, you know, and I dare say would help you to raise this money, if you wheedle him properly. At all events, two thousand pounds must be paid into Hammersley's hands by the time I say."

Blanche bowed.

"Well then, I suppose I may as well be off.

I dare say you'll fancy my room is better than
my company; and yet, Miss Vavasour, you're
rather a favourite of mine. I like your spirit,

it becomes you vastly; you've prodigious pretty eyes too; and when your colour rises, you're amazingly like what Mrs. T. was some eight or nine and twenty years ago. It's a pity you and Peter could not make it out together; however, here's your health and a good husband to you, soon." Then, seizing a decanter, Tomlinson poured out a quantity of port wine and swallowed it eagerly.

- " Stop, stop, Mr. Tomlinson; there is laudanum in that tumbler."
 - " Hey, what? laudanum did you say?"
- "Yes, the phial was broken, and the contents poured into that glass."
- "Which I've been drinking by way of port wine. Pleasant, certainly. However, I don't suppose there's any great harm done. Can't have taken enough to poison myself."
 - " Our medical man lives opposite."
- "No, no; 'tisn't worth while; can't have swallowed any thing to speak of; walking will take it off. Good afternoon, Miss Vavasour; don't forgetyour engagement. Good afternoon. This is

the way, I believe. Ah, there's Vavasour; regular churchyard cough; hope he won't go off before he's raised this money. If he should, there will be nothing for it, but to try Miss Blanche again: I suppose she'll get that legacy some day or other. Besides, I do believe, that jackanapes, Edward, would pay me himself rather than see her spoil her pretty face with crying. By the way, I wonder if she knows how to get at him. Mayn't be amiss to ask."

Tomlinson remounted the stairs.

" I say, Miss Vavasour," he cried, putting his head in at the door, but Blanche was no longer there.

"What, gone? flown already? humph! heard me coming, I suppose; and then, hey, presto! off like a bird. Well, well, it's no great matter. I can send the direction; and I'd better not be losing any more time; shall lose my dinner if I do—ha, ha; and, may be, get a lecture into the bargain from Mrs. T. for sweethearting with little Blanche Vavasour. So you're there,

young woman, are you? afraid I should forget the half-crown I promised you for letting me up. There, you're mistaken; William Tomlinson," he raised his voice, "is not the man to forget promise or threat. There's your money; now let me out."

The girl obeyed; Tomlinson left the house, while Blanche, who had been eagerly listening for his departure, returned to the drawing-room.

"What's all this noise of voices?" said Mr. Vavasour issuing from his chamber, "what is the reason, that you can't contrive to keep this room quiet for half an hour?"

Blanche explained; of course without disclosing Tomlinson's object; and the sick man's agitation on merely hearing who had been the visiter, fully proved that she had acted judiciously in preventing an interview. But, however satisfied of the wisdom which had dictated her resistance, she could not view the engagement she had, perhaps, too hastily contracted in any but a most distressing light. What, if her father should refuse to ratify the compact?

could she address herself to Edward? Her heart swelled at the bare idea. No—insulting, ruffian-like, as Tomlinson had shewn himself, Blanche felt that, rather than appeal again to Edward, she would risk a repetition of his insolence.

She was spared the necessity of either painful choice.

On leaving the house, Tomlinson walked rapidly until he hailed a stage coach bound for Peckham, on the top of which he placed himself.

"Charming afternoon," said one of the outside passengers; "no dust and a brisk, pleasant air."

Tomlinson replied not. The motion of the carriage and the gentle breeze greatly increased the drowsiness he had been struggling with for the last three quarters of an hour. Ten minutes afterwards, a heavy fall and a cry of horror induced the coachman to rein up his horses. In a state of utter insensibility, Tomlinson was raised from the ground. No bones were broken, no serious injury apparent, yet, from that hour, he remained an idiot!

CHAPTER XVI.

As the physician had predicted, change of air and scene, at first, served to rally Vavasour's slender stock of strength. So much did he appear to gain, indeed, that Blanche, deceived by the flattering improvement, almost believed that the patient had judged wisely. But the springs of life had been too nearly worn away to admit of any but a temporary invigoration. Towards the evening of the second day, increased debility came on, and sleeplessness followed. He persisted, however, in declaring himself better, and disregarding all his daughter's remonstrances, resolved to proceed.

With extreme difficulty he succeeded in

ascending the steps of the carriage; and it was only by being propped on all sides by pillows, that he was enabled to maintain any approach to the perpendicular position. Still he adhered to his intention; still obstinately persevered in pronouncing himself better; and, as if to prove the validity of this assertion, talked incessantly. It is true, his conversation was disjointed; at times, absolutely wandering. He was, in fact, under the influence of high fever; and greatly relieved was Blanche when, at length, he sunk into an apparently easy slumber.

They were within a few miles distance of Newstoke; and forgetting all other considerations in her anxiety for her father, only desirous to reach the termination of their journey, she recognized with joy and thankfulness various spots rendered familiar by her visit to that neighbourhood.

Suddenly a groan from Mr. Vavasour startled his daughter, who, turning quickly, saw, with horror, that he had sunk nearly to the bottom of the carriage. Blood was trickling from his mouth, and Blanche knew that his death-warrant was signed. She desired the postillion to stop.

"Take me out," he murmured—" lay me on a bed; I cannot bear this jolting. Lay me down beneath a hedge—any where—only let me lie down. I am fainting—I cannot sit upright—oh! lay me down!"

And a fresh stream came gushing from his mouth.

"Is there no inn—no house near?" asked the agonized Blanche. "What place is that I see amongst those trees?"

"That, Ma'am, is Farmer Smythies; and on beyond is the Vavasour Arms."

"Drive there, then," said Blanche. "Gently, gently; lead your horses."

"I don't think the Vavasour Arms will be a fit place for a sick gentleman," muttered the driver; and Blanche held the same opinion, when, after the lapse of a few minutes, the carriage stopt in front of what, in more populous parts of the country, would be called a public house, but was there designated an inn.

Humble, however, as was the dwelling, and indifferent as the accommodation promised, Blanche had no alternative. Her father had fallen into a state of utter insensibility; while the crimson drops, which still at intervals trickled down, proclaimed the absolute necessity of rest. By dint of great exertion, he was carried up the narrow stair-case and laid upon the bed in the best sleeping-room ;-a dreary looking place, with whitewashed walls, a floor uncarpeted, and neither chimney, nor window curtains. And there, in that comfortless apartment, on that uneasy bed, lay the once animated, handsome, gallant Frederic Vavasour, who had won poor Sophy Bransby's heartthat gentle heart which broke beneath the weight of sorrowful anxiety consequent on her imprudent marriage!

Blanche sat by her father's pillow, watching with fearfulness of spirit the last ebbings of his life. She knew he could not long exist: a few short hours, and the cold, clammy hand she chafed, and chafed in vain, would become yet colder; the breath he drew with so great difficulty, the heart, whose throbbings grew each moment fainter, be stilled for ever. And her eyes were dim with tears: for was he not her father? And though, alas, to honour or to love a man soiled with such guilt as his, were scarcely possible, he was her father still: and now their parting was at hand, Blanche both wept and trembled-wept for her own desolate and unprotected state; trembled for the fiat which, too probably, awaited him.

Often, during the last few months, she had endeavoured to lead her parent's mind to the consideration of a future state. But ever unsuccessfully. Mr. Vavasour's conscience appeared seared, impenetrable to alarm; and for his God—oh, he yet loved that gold which

had betrayed him; and yet he knelt before the sordid shrine of Mammon. Gold had been his God through life; and, even in his dying moments, gold ruled his destiny! On every other subject he appeared insensible. Deaf to inquiry, impassive to appeal, Mr. Vavasour lay silent, almost motionless; until the surgeon, Blanche had summoned, entered the room, and laid his hand upon the sick man's pulse. Then, starting from his state of seeming torpor, the wretched miser opened his dim eyes; and after glancing round, he rebuked Blanche sharply for her officiousness; and desired the new-comer to withdraw.

The surgeon hesitated, Mr. Vavasour insisted; until exhausted by the effort, he sunk again upon the pillow, murmuring to himself half broken sentences, whose import, evidently indicated that the prevailing passion of his latter years remained the despot of his dying hour.

Those were Frederic Vavasour's last words. Almost immediately upon their utterance, he fell into a lethargic slumber, and without a struggle or a groan, underwent that change, which makes of mortal man, a never dying spirit.

Blanche was still sitting by the bedside; but it was not for some time after her father's dissolution had taken place, that she became aware of his decease; and then, although an event for which she had been long prepared, she could scarcely bring herself to acquiesce in its reality. Nor, when convinced that he was no more, could she easily decide on the course it would be most desirable she should embrace. Something, however, must be done; some means adopted to inform Edward Vavasour of his relation's death; some step taken respecting the disposal of the corpse.

Although not in connexion with the idea of approximate decease, Mr. Vavasour had frequently expressed a wish to be interred at Newstoke Priors. Thither, therefore, his remains must be transported. But their con-

veyance there, without permission from the owner of the property, appeared an assumption of authority, Blanche shrunk from taking on herself. Bewildered and perplexed by these considerations, her brain fevered from want of sleep, her nerves unstrung by the shock she had lately undergone, she could bring her mind to no satisfactory conclusion; could discover no determination either meet or practicable.

Mechanically crossing the room, she threw back the casement, and, for the first time, became aware that she was indeed in a well-known spot; for the blue waves were rolling within a short distance from the inn; and nearer yet, stood the old church, she had so delighted to visit, when staying at Newstoke Priors. In fact, the house had been built for the accommodation of those who might be tempted by curiosity to visit that interesting edifice; and to facilitate their access to the object of their search, a wicket gate led from the trim garden of the Vavasour Arms to the burial ground.

Restless and feverish, Blanche suddenly resolved to see, once more, the place whose recollection ever blended in her mind with solemn yet happy feelings.

"I will go there, and pray," she said. And throwing on her walking dress, she passed through the garden and along the broken, moss-carpetted, pavement to the church.

No change, or at any rate, no change that was perceptible had happened in that dreary spot. A period of three years makes little in the lapse of centuries. The edifice appeared in all respects the same. Stately arch, and massive pillar; solemn effigy and quaint device; dim, tattered banner, slight tracery, and wreath of mimic flowers, that hung so gracefully it seemed as though some fairy hand had wrought and then suspended the fair ornament, were each as she had last beheld them.

They were the same. But, oh, how altered, was Blanche Vavasour! Her courage, her high spirit was laid low; her hopefulness was dim, her trust in others lost. In an hour of deep affliction Blanche had leant upon a reed, and it had pierced the hand which clung to it; and all her warm imaginings, her brilliant phantasies grew dull and lustreless.

Still, she was not in all ways bankrupt. There had been good and evil in her woof of life. Amidst the stubble and the weed of earthly sorrow, fair flowers of heavenly growth had blown. If she had lost, she had likewise gained. Although this world had grieved and disappointed, she had been taught to cast her eye beyond the narrow boundary of man's existence; to raise her thoughts, and hopes, and wishes from transitory things, to those which are immutable. In one sense, she had already exchanged mortality for life eternal.

And now, in a spot hallowed alike by time and holy purpose, Blanche knelt in prayer; and as she prayed, a heavenly serenity stole on her mind, hushing the tempest of her thoughts, and bidding the poor trembling spirit find repose in God.

It was that season of the year when the mid-day heat is frequently succeeded by a much lower temperature; twilight was drawing on; the bright, cold, moon flung her sad beams athwart the broken pavement; and as the damp sea breeze swept through the edifice. Blanche shivered. "It is growing late, and cold-aye, cold as this world will be to me. But not for long. Oh, no! My earthly course will not, cannot last long. And no one will grieve but my warm hearted Godfrey." As the image of her distant brother cast its dark shadow over her imagination, Blanche felt her spirit once more bowed to the very earth. "He knows all by this time. Yes, long before this, Godfrey must have received my letter acquainting him with our disgrace and misery. Alas! How shocked, how painfully humiliated he will be !"

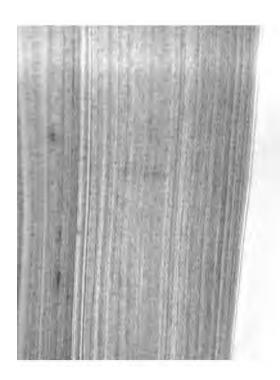
Then, by one of those transitions which render the human mind so difficult a problem, Blanche's thoughts reverting to the past, her ready fancy imaged vividly the semblances of those whose effigies, or mortuary inscriptions met her eye; whose bones lay mouldering beneath her feet.

There they were—the stalwart knight, the mitred priest, the noble dame, the gentle demoiselle. Alice and Reginald, Godfrey, Arthur, Blanche. She shuddered and her heart grew sick. It almost seemed as if she read her own grim epitaph.

Yes, they were there; the founders of a noble race. Valiant, and wise, and pious: such had they been who slept beneath those solemn monuments. And what was he, whose spirit had just fled its mortal tenement? A miserable miser!

Farewell to Blanche's pride of Norman ancestry. She could have wished herself some honest herdsman's child: and she smiled bitterly as memory recalled the days when she had used to glory in her name.

But nature's voice would still be heard. Was there no extenuation for her father's crime?



Time crept on, the evening was closing rapidly; Blanche was yet in the hallowed spot to which, in her agony of spirit, she had flown, when she was startled by the plash of oars, followed by voices; and remembering that lawless characters were supposed sometimes to haunt that lonely building, and fearful lest the new comers might prove of that description, she hastened to depart. On leaving the doorway, she perceived that a man had landed from an open boat, and was in the act of crossing the churchyard. His dress at once relieved her mind from all idea of danger; but, anxious to avoid remark, she advanced slowly, hoping that he would enter the Inn without observing She miscalculated. On reaching the garden gate, the stranger turned, and seeing a ladylike female approaching that outlet, naturally held the wicket back; and Blanche, however unwillingly, was forced to avail herself of his politeness.

She walked with faltering steps; for it was

Edward Vavasour. He did not recognise her until they were within a couple of yards of each other, when a gesture of surprise sufficiently betrayed his astonishment at her unlooked for apparition. Blanche was comparatively calm. It had occurred to her that a rencontre, which at first appeared most inopportune, might prove the means of smoothing many of the difficulties that half an hour ago had so harassed her; and she spoke first.

"Mr. Vavasour, we meet in strange places; and under very painful circumstances: such is, it seems, our destiny. But this present interview, although not sought for, should not be subject of regret to one of us, at least. Had I not seen, I must have written to you—Yes," she continued, speaking with great rapidity, "I must have addressed a letter to you. It was necessary that you should be apprised of that which has lately happened. My father—"

[&]quot; Is not worse, I hope."

"Is dead!" she answered, in a whisper, so sad, so solemn, that Edward felt his flesh creep.

"He expired this morning, early; and—and
—Mr. Vavasour, it was his wish, his dying
wish, that his remains should lie where most
of his race are sleeping; that Newstoke Priors
should be his final resting place. Have I your
permission to fulfil that wish?"

Edward was too much overcome to answer, instantly. Blanche mistook the working of his features for displeasure; his silence, for disinclination; and she cried, impatiently—

"Nay, if you object—if you entertain the faintest feeling of repugnance to this desire of my poor father's, far be it from me to seek its accomplishment. He shall be buried here; in this desolate burial ground, room shall be found for him."

"You mistake me:" Edward answered;

you mistake me, altogether. Mr. Vavasour's
wish has my entire sanction; and if there be

any other way in which I can prove of service to you, I hope you will command me."

Blanche thanked her cousin; but not with cordiality. She was unhappy, and the unhappy are easily irritated; for sorrow jaundices the mind. She fancied that Edward's manner was not such as it should have been in granting a request of this nature. There was something, also, in the circumstance itself, which brought home to her heart the extent of her late parent's guilt. Without permission from the man whom he had wronged, even his bones might not, it seemed, find a place beside those of his progenitors; and the sting of shame was added to the sense of desolation.

They separated. Blanche passing quickly through the garden, into the dwelling; Edward returning towards the sea shore.

With an impression of painful interest, she observed him cross the cemetry; and when, not long afterwards, she discerned the boat cutting the moon-lit waves asunder, a fresh feeling of loneliness fell upon her heart. It was true, she had repulsed Edward, had declined his offer of assistance; still, was it necessary he should have been so easily rebuffed? Might he not have made one effort more to lighten her anxieties? Knowing, as well he must, the difficulties which surrounded her.

Could Godfrey have acted thus towards any woman? Would Lord Warleigh towards her? Oh, no! Neither Lord Warleigh, nor Philip Marwell, would have evinced such cruel indifference.

Blanche could not but remember the last time she and Edward stood together where they had so lately parted. It was impossible not to contrast the tender solicitude he then had evidenced with his, now, more than indifference. She recalled the eagerness which had once forestalled her every wish. In all their walks and rides how great had been his watchfulness; how frequently the ready arm had

been presented; how carefully each trifling obstacle that might obstruct her path, removed. How anxious he had been to direct her notice where he imagined she would discover most to amuse or interest. How he had hung upon her words; how, entered into all her feelings! And now, he knew her to be overwhelmed with care; alone, without companion or support, and, yet, could leave her.

Crushed and borne down, Blanche flung herself upon her knees and poured forth her heaviness of soul in earnest supplication. The appeal was not without effect. As she prayed, her mind grew calmer; her feelings less embittered. She remembered that some of the difficulties which a few hours since had much harassed her were already smoothed; and, for the rest, might she not trust that God who shields the orphan, and who dries the mourner's tear?

In the spirit of grateful dependence, she laid her aching temples on the pillow. But sleep would not, readily, bestow her soothing influence upon a brain which had been so much overwrought. Blanche's dreams were vivid and distressing. A crowd of hideous images peopled her mind. The past, the present, the living and the dead mingled confusedly together. Circumstances most revolting, scenes eminently painful, for ever haunted her imagination. The panorama often varied, the actors in the frightful drama changed, but only to increase the victims suffering. The perpetual rush of images was in itself distressing; while each mutation of the terrible phantasmagoria surpassed in horror that which had preceded it.

At length these fevered fantasies assumed a form of greater regularity. Blanche thought herself once more within the church. But the sacred edifice no longer bore its present semblance. It was as it might have been four hundred years ago. Majestic tapers blazed before the altar, where knelt a gorgeously

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attired priest; the air was redolent with spicy incense; while the roof echoed the rich notes of white robed choristers.

Quaint seemed to Blanche the vestments of the crowd which occupied the body of the church;—there she discerned the snowy coif, embroidered veil, rich jewelled bodice, velvet cap and plume. All these were strange to Blanche; yet she beheld an object still more out of place. The edifice was gaudily bedecked as for a bridal; but where the marriage party should have been, there stood a bier, which dark, lugubrious, seemed to scoff at all the pomp, the barmony and brightness that surrounded it.

With the intuition common to the night vision, the dreamer knew that her father's corpse occupied that narrow tenement. These were then his obsequies—but, where the mourners? where the solemn requiem? Then, as she marvelled at these marks of disrespect, the priest came forward and addressing her by name, bade her proclaim the story of her father's guilt. At the same time, her arm was firmly grasped. Oh, was it Edward who thus sought to force her rudely forward?

The drama shifted. She was alone—priest, choristers and motley crowd of worshippers had vanished. She was alone—alone with the silent dead!

No tapers gleamed, no voices chorussed through the church, no aromatic fragrance filled the air. In their place, darkness, silence, dank, vault-like vapours. A sudden blaze of light illuminated the whole building; with a tremendous crash, the tombs were rent asunder and their grim occupants started up—a ghastly multitude; the dead re-animated, not restored to life.

Blanche turned towards the bier; an unseen hand slowly withdrew the pall, the coffin lid flew back, and she saw that it was Godfrey, not her father, who lay stretched within—Godfrey, his winding sheet all stained with

blood, his erewhile bright and glossy hair matted and stiff.

Death's livid hue was on the mouth; yet, even now, he seemed to smile, while the eyes, those kind and gentle eyes, whose glance had been so often bent on Blanche with brotherly affection, still turned as if to beckon her to his true heart. She would have flung herself upon the bier, but the power of motion was denied.

" Blanche!"

She turned. A shadowy form was standing near; the face was shrouded, but the voice, oh how familiar, once how dear, had been the accents of that voice to her.

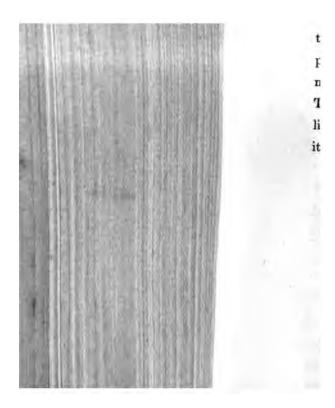
" Blanche !"

The spectre glided near — close, close to Blanche. An icy vapour chilled her frame, and a cold death-like hand was laid on hers. Then came another fearful crash, and almost screaming she awoke!

For some time, she remained in a state of semi-consciousness, almost repeating her terrific dream. A storm had risen; and as the peals of thunder shook the house, even the bed on which she lay, each circumstance of her appalling vision returned with painful vividness. At intervals, also, she caught the sound of conversation, and she could not divest herself of the impression, that it was Edward's voice she heard.

Raising herself up, she listened breathlessly. There were, indeed, voices in the room below; for the people of the house were sitting up and busily engaged in calculating the gain, that would accrue to them from the late awful catastrophe.

Of a truth, the interior of the dwelling, on that night, offered no inapt illustration of the economy of human life. In one room, grief and suffering; in another death; in a third, the rough struggle for existence,—as regards the greater portion of mankind, at least. There are, we know, bright pages in the history of most men; there are a few, whose whole exis-



CHAPTER XVII.

THE sun was already high in the heavens, when Blanche awoke on the succeeding morning. Hastily dressing herself, she threw back the latticed window of the little sitting room; and while a brisk invigorating breeze played around her temples, her eye wandered amid scenes of varied loveliness.

In the distance lay the Ocean; its surface dotted with white sails; its waves crested with snowy, sparkling foam. The tide was going out, leaving, as it retired, a belt of glittering and broken, at intervals, by small hillocks of shells and shingle, or dusky patches of sea weed, and bounded by the beetling cliff. Corn

mer, the sicile was yet busy, and orchards were immediately contiguous to the dwelling.

In spite of the close vicinity of the sea, conservood was abundant, the hedge rows bushy; while, not unfrequently, a gnarled cak fung its fantastic branches far and wide, or venerable elm reared its majestic head. As yet, few of the trees had assumed their bright autumnal garb; still, here and there, a bough was touched with ruby or with gold, and the fruit peeped rich and glowing from between the leaves; while yellow or russet decked the hedges and contrasted admirably with the deep purple of the ripening bramble herry.

Excepting where a thin wreath of smoke rose from the chimney of a neighbouring house, and after a few seconds mingled with the transparent æther, the heavens were one vast sheet of blue. There was no cloud in all the sky, no dimness in the sunbeam. Above was brilliancy; joy and activity below;—everywhere, beauty.

The sea gulls' wing gleamed soft and bright as hither, thither, it pursued its finny prey across the limpid waters; swallows shot like meteors through the air, or twittered cheerily, beneath the pendant roof; the autumn butterfly, ever more gaudy than its spring compeer, followed its wayward, zigzag course; the red breast hopped from twig to twig, or from some bush, or withered stump, so close at hand you might but marvel at its saucy freedom, raptured the ear with its rich, gushing melody; even the lark, late as the season was, occasionally, chanted its full, gladsome notes.

All nature was instinct with happiness; for a brief space, Blanche forgot her cares; there was contagion in the universal joy, and she stood rapt in a state of dreamy, vague enjoyment, until startled by the husky croaking of a raven.

The cause of this unwelcome interruption

was quickly ascertained. A tame bird of that species, belonging to the master of the inn, was disputing with some fowls his portion of crumbs, shaken from the wallet of a labourer occupying a stone bench before the door.

But, however simple the occurrence, Blanche could not resist an emotion of superstitious dread. She remembered her visit to the Fairy Spring, her dream on the preceding night, and, trembling for her brother, she gave way to an impression of dark despondency.

This frame of mind was morbid. Blanche knew it was; and, resolved to combat the unhealthy feeling, she forced her thoughts into another channel. She watched the gleaner's movements, she marked the reaper's toil, she listened to the snatch of song, the shout of merriment that rose from time to time, and she felt that their honest cheerfulness rebuked her.

She had scarcely finished a very homely breakfast, when a visiter was announced; and the next moment, Mr. Revely entered, with both his hands extended towards Blanche, and his countenance radiant with kindness and good nature.

"My dear Miss Vavasour," he said, "I have heard of your affliction; in coming, therefore, to offer mine and Mrs. Revely's best services, I am taking the privilege of, I can hardly say, an old friend, but I may say, a very warm one." Blanche's looks expressed that gratitude her lips could not. "Yes," pursued the kind-hearted being, "I wouldn't lose a moment, or Mrs. Revely would have come with me. But the fact is, you see, we've lost our governess, she's just married, and my wife can't very well leave home until two o'clock; so she desires me to say, with her kind regards, that she hopes you will come immediately to Conyngsby, and remain with us as long as convenient to yourself. The carriage is below."

"You are very, very kind," Blanche answered; "and I should be only too happy to

profit by your friendly offer, were it not for-"

"I know, I know;—the funeral—your poor father's remains; never mind, don't let that detain you. Leave every thing to me; I'll stay here until proper persons arrive from Newstoke. Now, don't be afraid; I'll manage all as it ought to be. This isn't a proper place for a young lady of your age; and I'm sure your head can't be in a state to give the necessary orders. So you must make me your deputy. Have you been eating that coarse unwholesome bread?" he continued, unable even at that moment, to resist the peculiar bias of his fancy. "The best to be had here, I suppose. And that's another reason for your coming to us."

Blanche demurred; but not for long. There was not only kindness, there was sense, and there was truth in Mr. Revely's observations. That afternoon, therefore, found her installed in comfort and respectability at Conyngsby.

Mrs. Revely was, in the fullest sense of the expression, a motherly woman; and now, that Miss Vavasour's position challenged such manifestations, she bestowed on her young guest an ample portion of maternal watchfulness and care.

It is true, that Mrs. Revely's family devotedness left Blanche many hours of entire solitude. But these were welcome; she had so
much to think about, so many subjects of
anxiety, that she was glad to be alone. Faithful to his promise, Mr. Revely relieved her
from all care respecting her father's obsequies;
but there were other sources of uneasiness;
and, possibly, the most prominent, her own
future residence.

Frederic Vavasour left no Will. His affairs, judging from the few memoranda Blanche could lay her hand upon, were in great confusion; excepting the legacy from Captain Bransby, she believed herself pennyless; and even that trifling provision, she considered

of the next six months, Godfrey might be expected in England; but until he came, where should she find a home? With Mrs. Turner, undoubtedly, she might; but, well aware of her friend's restricted circumstances, she shrunk from adding to her pecuniary liabilities. Miss Bransby's house would, naturally, be likewise open; yet to spend her life with her and Arthur was, indeed, a most distasteful prospect; at the same time, kind and hospitable as her present entertainers were, beyond a few weeks, Blanche could not contemplate the idea of remaining at Conyngsby.

Whilst in this state of painful perplexity, a letter from Harriet Greville reached our heroine; and not often has the perusal of any similar document induced stronger emotions of gratitude. Harriet had been nearly two years a widow; about six weeks in England. She was living in strict retirement, in a small place in the Isle of Wight, which had been settled

on her at the time of her marriage; and which, with the addition of a thousand pounds a-year, constituted the only remaining advantage she reaped from the once promising alliance. One of Miss Bransby's predictions had certainly been verified. Mr. Greville died before succeeding to the family estate.

"Come to me, dear Blanche," wrote the warm-hearted Harriet; "come to me, instantly; and stay as long as you have patience to bear with a fractious invalid. Mama is here, just now, but leaves me early next month."

Blanche's heart actually leapt on reading this letter. She knew that Harriet loved her. They were, in some respects, similarly circumstanced. Retirement was the first wish of both; until, therefore, her brother should return she was provided with a peaceful home.

Miss Bransby's letter, à-propos of Mr. Va-

vasour's decease, was of a far less satisfactory nature. After a slight reprimand to Blanche for suffering her to learn the news from a public source of information, and a few flings, gentler, however, than they would have been in former days, at Mr. Vavasour's covetousness, aunt Letitia proceeded:

"With regard to my annuity, I purpose continuing to draw for it; for although Fylaway has paid a larger dividend than was expected, my share amounting to five thousand three hundred and seventy-two pounds, four shillings, and five-pence three-farthings, and will, I believe, pay more, I cannot exist and maintain Arthur on the interest of it. I purpose, therefore, drawing the usual sum, which, I am sure, Godfrey will never grudge."

"No," thought Blanche, "Godfrey would gladly double it; but what will Edward say?" and she bit her lip with vexation.

Still, she did not see how, at present, it

would be possible to make her aunt Letitia understand that the property was not Godfrey's. There remained, consequently, nothing but to suffer Miss Bransby's scheme to take its course.

"And pray, my dear," continued the old lady, "what sort of a place is Newstoke? I want to know, because I'm getting tired of a watering-place; and if I could meet with a cottage in that neighbourhood, I should prefer to settle there. I think, on your account, it would be desirable for me to be at hand. At any rate, until your brother marries; for you are too young and inexperienced to live with only him at Newstoke Priors. I must say, I think it very singular that your father should have left no Will. But, are you sure? I dare say you have not looked half over the papers. If there is really no Will, I suppose it is because he could not make up his mind to part

with his money; but I should not be surprised yet to find that there is one.

Your affectionate aunt, LETITIA BRANSBY."

Blanche answered her aunt's communication in general terms, and after a residence of three weeks at Conyngsby, set off for the Isle of Wight.

Of Edward Vavasour she saw nothing more during her sojourn in — shire. His name was scarcely even mentioned. But she gathered from the children, that he had been at Conyngsby only a short time since; in short, she fancied that it was from thence he came the evening of their rencontre in the burial ground; and sometimes, Blanche suspected that it was to him she owed the kindly offices of her present host and hostess.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The journey was accomplished with ease and comfort. Mr. Revely accompanied Blanche to Southampton, and saw her on board the steamer which was to convey her to Cowes. He was a kind hearted man, that Mr. Revely; and not, as was soon evident, the only goodnatured individual present. Lord Warleigh, with one of his sisters, was amongst the passengers.

At first, the greeting between him and his quondam favourite was stiff and cold. But, observing that Miss Vavasour had no companion excepting her attendant, the good-tempered young man could not forbear offering some trifling attentions, which she received with so much amenity, that he proposed her taking his seat beside his sister; an unaffected, pretty-looking girl, apparently, her brother's counterpart in amiability.

Grateful to Lord Warleigh, pleased with her new acquaintance, Blanche regretted when the Skylark, having accomplished her passage, it became necessary to land in the face of a crowd of people, better dressed, perhaps, than bred, who had flocked to witness, what they had seen a thousand times before, the disembarkation of the passengers from an insignificant steam-boat.

Blanche found her friend altered in person, yet improved. She was more delicate and lady-like in appearance, her manners more composed; and, at times, her features wore a grave, subdued expression, that contrasted admirably with the bright smile and laughing eye which still, at other moments, revived the memory of days gone by.

And Harriet thought Blanche altered, but

not improved. She was pallid, haggard, emaciated; and the pensiveness which sat upon her brow was never broken; for although she did endeavour to be cheerful, did struggle unceasingly to master, or, at least, conceal her grief, the effort was in vain. Anxiety and care chased slumber from her pillow; while shame, the shame of knowing herself the offspring of a man who had played the part her father had enacted, for ever haunted her. felon's daughter-such was she-such would the world know her to be; and as such, despise and frown upon her. It was scarcely possible that a transaction, of which so many were cognisant, could long remain unknown by all; nor was it at all probable that Edward would care to maintain secrecy in this respect. the contrary, the probability was greater that, for his own sake, he would bring every circumstance connected with the loss and the recovery of his inheritance, before the public eye.

Thus, not unnaturally, argued Blanche; and

the distressing surmise gathered strength from her observing that her friends seemed perfectly aware of the reversion of the Newstoke Priors' property to its original channel; and yet, although this circumstance was calculated to excite their curiosity, neither Harriet nor her mother ventured an interrogation on the subject.

"They know it all," thought Blanche.
"They are aware of the disgrace I labour under; and hence it is, that though Harriet is every thing that is considerate, and delicate, and kind, Mrs. Brownlow treats me with coldness, and evidently does not wish my presence here. Oh, if she could but guess how much a chilling look or word distresses me! But she has never known what real affliction is; and those who have been always prosperous, cannot appreciate feelings they have not experienced."

Blanche had not been many days at Merton Hill before her spirits underwent a fresh trial. She was sitting with Harriet, in a sort of rustic summer-house, when a footstep was heard approaching, and looking up, she beheld Edward Vavasour. Harriet coloured, and with an expression of pleasure and surprise, presented her hand, which he took with a degree of familiarity that struck home to Blanche's heart, and augmented the embarrassment she must have felt on meeting Edward anywhere, or under any circumstances. Mr. Vavasour was better at his ease; accosting her with kindness, he expressed pleasure, not astonish ment, at finding her at Merton.

Soon after, they were joined by Mrs. Brownlow, whose ostensible object was to expostulate with Harriet on her imprudence in remaining out so long. They returned, therefore; Blanche, with Mrs. Brownlow leaning on her arm, in advance; Harriet and Vavasour walking, leisurely, at some little distance.

Blanche saw the whole. They were undoubtedly engaged: and the dream, which she had sometimes ventured to include, that henceforth she should find a home beneath her friend's roof, was at an end.

"All things are against me!" she thought mournfully. "Almost the only earthly friend I had will, must, become estranged from me. I live with Harriet? Impossible! She may wish it; she says she does; and, perhaps, with sincerity. But he, I—oh, no. Neither Mr. Vavasour, nor I, could ever endure to reside beneath the same roof. And yet, there was a time—but I must not think of that. Away, away, with such reflections." Then brushing back the tears which had gathered in her eyes, Blanche commenced her dinner toilet.

Edward dined at Merton, but returned to his inn to sleep. The evening passed heavily; an air of restraint appearing to hang on all parties. Harriet, certainly, looked happy; Edward satisfied; still, neither was unembarrassed. Blanche felt so sick and faint that more than once, during the evening, she was obliged to leave the room. Her absence was

scarcely observed; lovers are never supposed to notice other people; while Mrs. Brownlow's whole mind was too much bent on leaving Harriet and Edward to themselves, to regard a circumstance tending to promote this object.

"Blanche," said Harriet, on the following day, "are you very angry? Do you mean to scold me for this second reserve? I mean, for not confiding my engagement with your cousin to you? Nay, you must not; for you know, how much I have always hated talking of love affairs."

"You are engaged?" said Blanche; rather at a loss for a reply.

"Yes; I suppose the relation in which we stand is, strictly speaking, an engagement; although, I don't usually allow it to be one. You know," Harriet added, half smiling, and glancing at her dress, "so long as I wear this, it would be indelicate to engage myself a second time."

"There is, then, an understanding, between VOL. III.

you and Edward Vavasour? And when the usual period of widowhood shall have elapsed, you will be married?"

"So mama says; for she is the manager in this instance. You know, it was always a mania of her's that I should marry a rich man. For my own part, having tasted the sweets of matrimony once, I sometimes think—"

"Nay, Harriet, you surely are attached to Mr. Vavasour?"

Harriet turned her head away.

"I like him well enough; and, possibly, should like him better, if it were not for a trifling mortification he once inflicted on my vanity."

"How, dear Harriet?"

"Why, you see," said Harriet, rather sheepishly, "I spent the first winter after poor Sidney's death, at Rome, in strict retirement, of course. Well, there I met Edward Vavasour, almost as much a hermit as myself. We saw a good deal of each other. I liked his an old story, you know. Edward was very much in love; but I was wealthy; he, poor, and too high-hearted to seek to marry a woman whom the world reckoned his superior. So he continued lagging on, until my penetration having read his motives; and my patience (a virtue of which my stock was never large) being quite exhausted, I—I—proposed, my-self."

"My dear Harriet!"

"I don't mean, that I actually said 'Mr. Vavasour, will you be so good as to accept me?' but a friend of mine—friends are very convenient articles on such occasions—intimated to the bashful youth, that Harriet Greville was above mercenary calculations."

"And what did he do? Throw himself at your feet in an ecstasy of love and gratitude?"

"No, indeed. He wrote me an exceedingly well expressed letter, full of love, and admiration, and esteem, and so on; at the same time assuring me, that he could not take advantage of my generosity: such conduct, in his estimation, would have been less than manly. You think him right, Blanche? Yes—I see you do. And so, perhaps, he was. Still, I felt rather mortified than pleased at his disinterestedness; more particularly, as he, forthwith, took his departure from Rome."

- " Edward is very proud."
- "I know it; and the reflection proved my greatest consolation."
- "But you are engaged after all? How was it brought about?"
- "In this manner. Old Lady Warleigh, you know, lives not far from this; a stupid, tiresome, woman; but, as we had known her son intimately, mama insisted on my cultivating her acquaintance. When, therefore, she invited us to dine and sleep at her house, I was obliged to consent. We went; and there found Edward Vavasour. Pity me, Blanche; the meeting was

really awkward. I am sure, I blushed; and so, I think, did he. However, to prove that I was neither vexed nor mortified with our Roman episode, I was unusually frank and friendly in my treatment of him; and the consequence proved a conversation with mama, in which Mr. Vavasour informed her, that having now every prospect of a material change in his fortunes, he was anxious to enroll himself as my admirer. My position was, you will allow, delicate; I could neither refuse nor accept. But, happily, my black dress furnished a pretext for delay; and I commissioned mama to tell him, that, until the two years are fully expired, I can listen to no overture of this nature. Moreover, I expressed my determination of not receiving his visits."

"Which determination, you both adhere to, admirably."

"Indeed, his arrival yesterday was quite unexpected; and I shall not allow him to remain. In fact, mama leaves us in a few days, and then he must depart." " Poor Godfrey !" said Blanche unwittingly.

Harriet started-

"What of your brother?"

"Only that—but I ought not to speak of him."

"Does Godfrey still care for me?"

Blanche hesitated; and we will not analyse the feelings which prompted her reply, when, at length, she answered—

"In the last letter I received from him, my brother asks, whether I thought, as the heir of Newstoke Priors, he would have any chance with you. But he is not the heir of Newstoke Priors, now," Blanche added, quickly.

"How did that happen? How is it that the family estate goes back to Edward? And how did it ever come into your line at all?"

"Has Mr. Vavasour not told you?"

"No. I cannot get him to give me one word of explanation; which I think very tiresome; for I am, naturally, anxious about it. And what makes Edward's silence the more provoking, is, that he declares he never will tell me; a determination that, of course, greatly increases my curiosity. How was it, dear? Nay, you may trust me. Am I not, almost, one of the family?"

- " Harriet, I cannot."
- "You cannot?"
- "No; do not, pray do not, ask me." Then rising, hastily, Blanche left the room.

In the hall she met Edward; and full of gratitude for his delicate reserve, she could scarcely forbear expressing her sense of thankfulness. She did not actually;—but music's self was in the voice in which she spoke the usual salutation—while a smile, so soft, it had been almost deemed affectionate, played round her mouth.

A cloud passed over Edward's features; and when he accosted Harriet, his manner was constrained and sorrowful.

CHAPTER XIX.

Bur if Blanche's smile was soft, Harriet's was gladsome and inspiriting. Soon she won Edward from his gloomy mood, and Blanche fancied she had never seen him in such high spirits, as on their return from wandering on the beach that afternoon.

Poor Blanche! How chilling lay the sense of isolation on her heart! How desolate, how painfully alone, she felt. Happiness was all around her; Edward, Harriet, Mrs. Brownlow, all were gay; all satisfied and happy; while she was bending under sorrow and anxiety. And there was no one to whom she could impart her cares; no one to lighten her weight of misery, or breathe a syllable of consolation!

It is true, they were all kind to her; but it was the kindness of compassion, not of sympathy: and, with a disposition such as hers, pity tends more to irritate than soothe.

And, although Blanche endeavoured to quell the spirit of repining; to hush those dark, and impious questionings, which, in the hour of trial and temptation, will force themselves into the hearts and minds of the most holy men, she could not always keep her subtil enemy at bay, nor refrain from drawing a comparison between her destiny and Harriet's. The one all brightness and prosperity; the other, gloom and wretchedness! And this last happiness, this crowning blessing of a cup already full to overflowing with earthly bliss-Edward's affection-shall that be also given? Yes, his affection, surely, was a blessing; no one who saw him, as he now appeared, could for a moment question it. Full, as he was, of kindness, and tender thoughtfulness for every one, what would he be for her he loved?

"Blanche," said Harriet, one evening, "look at this bracelet, and tell me if it is what I intended it to be?—the ditto of one of yours. Don't you remember, an old fashioned bracelet Mr. Vavasour gave you, and which I wanted you to bestow on me? But you were churlish, and would not. So I was obliged to imitate, and I do not think very successfully. Where is the original? Do get it, and let us compare the two."

"I have it no longer in my possession."

"What, you have parted with it? Well then, I shall quarrel with you. Indeed, Blanche, I shall. If you have given away that bracelet after refusing it to me, I conceive that I have a perfect, most undoubted, right to feel offended."

"I did not give away any of those trinkets," said Blanche, in a steady tone of voice.

"Then what has become of it? Lost?"

"No. My father-"

"Sold it, I dare say. What an odd man

Mr. Vavasour was," cried the thoughtless Harriet; and crossing the room, she placed herself at the piano.

Edward was playing chess with Mrs. Brownlow: the game was but half concluded; and to all appearance, the advantage all on his side; but a succession of false moves, on his part, quickly rendered her the victor; and, without asking whether or not she wished to persevere, he pushed back his chair: then, rising suddenly, drew close to Blanche, and almost in a whisper, said—

"It was not, then, your act; you were not a party to the transfer of those ornaments?"

"I am sorry you should believe me capable of such ingratitude. I had no part whatever in the disposal of Mr. Vavasour's gifts: nor even a suspicion of their destination, until I saw some of them at Wellclose House," Blanche said, reproachfully. And as she spoke, her eye glanced keenly, her cheek was crimson, her small, gracefully proportioned head thrown proudly back. Long it was,

since Blanche had looked so beautiful as

Edward was silent for a moment; then, drawing still nearer to Miss Vavasour, he was on the point of again addressing her, when Mrs. Brownlow exclaimed—

"Harriet, Harriet, I must insist upon it that you sing no more. I cannot, will not, suffer it. This morning, you sang for at least twenty minutes; and, you know, you are forbidden vocal music altogether. Mr. Vavasour, pray interfere. Blanche, my dear Blanche, take Harriet's place; do, to oblige me."

" Mama, I am not tired."

"It does not matter. You must not sing another note. Mr. Vavasour, her health, her life, itself, depend upon it. Pray, interpose your veto.—Blanche, my dear—"

Blanche obeyed. Mr. Vavasour did the same. She, by playing, for she could not sing; he, by devoting himself to Harriet, until it was time to separate for the night.

Blanche fancied that Harriet's "good night"

was not quite as cordial as usual. Mrs. Brownlow's dismissal of her was, unquestionably,
distant and unfriendly. And, on the morrow,
she did not fancy, she was certain, that
Edward's manner was deeply tinctured with
reserve;—a caprice which appeared to grow
upon him: he rarely spoke to, or even looked
at her; and when the forms of good breeding
constrained him to address Miss Vavasour, his
words were few, his tone distant and ceremonious.

At first, Blanche was painfully affected by this change of mood: but after reflection prompted, that she should rather acknowledge the circumstance as a subject for rejoicing. In their present position, it was, surely, better she should entertain hard thoughts of Mr. Vavasour; that the distressing lesson she had once learnt from him, should be engraven on her heart even in adamantine characters: and often, often, did she force her thoughts to rest upon the scene which had disclosed how little

worthy of her love had been the idol she had shrined in her young heart; aye, and had almost worshipped.

Blanche was acting towards Edward as he had done formerly by her; with this difference, however, that while passion and pride had been his prompters—propriety and prudence were hers. Still, the result was, in both respects, alike; Edward had nursed his angry feelings till they grew into aversion; she encouraged hers, until scornful indifference became the abiding temper of her mind.

CHAPTER XX.

Miss Vavasour met other acquaintances besides Edward and Lord Warleigh. A Fancy Fair, for the benefit of some local charity, had been announced; which, failing better amusement, many visiters, as well as residents, resolved to patronise.

Mrs. Greville was one of the number. Blanche would gladly have remained at home; but Harriet, without intending it, was apt to exercise a sort of petty tyranny over every member of the family. That which amused her must, she supposed, amuse her friends. An entertainment to which she wished to go, could not, by any possibility, prove wearisome to Blanche.

To the bazaar, therefore, Mrs. Brownlow, Blanche, Harriet and Edward went, and were not long in wishing themselves away. The day was unfavourable; the objects exhibited for sale not worth the trouble of inspection; and the company exceedingly indifferent. To add to their discomposure, long before the time appointed for the arrival of their carriage, a shower of rain obliged them to take shelter in a booth appropriated to the sale of refreshments; and now, crowded to excess. Harriet amused herself with quizzing the different individuals who offended her notion of fashion, or gentility. Mrs. Brownlow conversed with one or two acquaintances; and Blanche, with Lord Warleigh.

"Do go and see if that tiresome carriage is not come," said Harriet, having exhausted her powers of satire. And Edward departed, for the third time in quest of the vehicle.

Near the entrance, his passage was obstructed by his old admirer, Augusta Marwell, now Mrs. Peter Tomlinson, hanging on her husband's arm.

- "La!" she exclaimed, accosting Edward,
 "Mr. Forrester, how do you do?"
- "Forrester?" said Peter. "Why, Gussy, what can you be thinking of? That gentleman's name's not Forrester."
- "Mr. Forrester," Augusta persevered, "I'm very glad to see you; and that's more than every one would be. Mama was exceedingly angry at the way in which you left Wellclose House. She was, indeed. But, perhaps, you wouldn't like it to be talked about; now, too, that you're in such high company; so, we'll say no more about it; only mama was sadly vexed; which, you know, wasn't wonderful; because, it's impossible to get a tutor, such as she requires, all in a minute."

"If I mistake not," Edward answered, vexedly, for general attention was beginning to direct itself towards him, "you mentioned Mrs. Marwell's displeasure in both the letters I received from you."

"Letters! La, Mr. Forrester, what letters? What can you mean?"

"Simply, that twice I had the honour of hearing from Miss Augusta Marwell. Whether the communications were clandestine or not, I do not venture to surmise."

"Mr. Forrester, it's a fib. I never wrote to any gentleman clandestinely. And you're very unpolite to tax me with doing any thing of the sort. Peter, this gentleman's insulting me!" exclaimed the weak Augusta, now disliking Edward quite as much as she had, formerly, believed herself attached to him: and whose attack owed its origin to spleen caused by his neglecting her overtures.

"Sir," said Peter, bristling up, "this lady is my wife; and if any body dares to insult her, I shall require satisfaction."

" If," answered Edward, " I have distressed

your wife's feelings, I am ready to apologise; or, rather, to explain."

"Oh, no; I am not offended;" said the weak Augusta, suddenly awakened to the danger of an exposure.

Edward continued, without regarding her words: "As for you, Mr. Peter Tomlinson, you are entirely beneath my notice. I will trouble you to stand aside, and suffer me to pass."

"Pretty chap, indeed, to give himself such airs!" Peter muttered; at the same time trying to look big; although, in truth, he much rejoiced when Edward's back was turned: while Mrs. Peter, who since her marriage—a stolen one—had sometimes entertained suspicions respecting her husband's pedigree, in an under voice expressed her surprise at Edward's conduct and manner; which last, she averred, was more like a master speaking to a servant, than one gentleman addressing another.

Augusta went extremely near the mark; and Peter, feeling every moment more uncomfortable, looked around for any object that might serve to change the conversation.

"As I'm alive," he at length exclaimed, "there's Blanche Vavasour!" Then, dragging his lady after him with so little ceremony, that she nearly fell over Lord Warleigh, Tomlinson forced his way to Blanche. "Well, Miss Vavasour," he began, while proffering a hand she did not choose to see; "so you're amongst old friends again. Glad of it; for, you know, it is'nt always that genteel people like to keep company with the daughter of"

"You are faint, Miss Vavasour; the heat of the tent has overcome you," Lord Warleigh cried, whilst smelling-bottles and vinaigrettes were eagerly presented.

"If we could only get away!" exclaimed Harriet. "Edward, is that carriage ever coming? or, are we to stay here all night?"

- "My cab is waiting," said Lord Warleigh, doubtfully.
- "Yes, yes; that will do. Blanche, dear, the air will revive you more than any thing."

Blanche was already better; and as Mrs. Greville's carriage was then announced, in that they returned home.

- "Poor Lord Warleigh!" remarked Harriet.

 "How provoked and disappointed he was. If
 it were not quite contrary to etiquette, I should
 expect to hear of his challenging Christopher
 for bringing the carriage just in time to prevent
 his driving Blanche home."
- "What made you faint, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Brownlow.
- "What a question, mama! Just think of the heat, the crowd, the smell of tarts and cheesecakes."
- "Horrid!" said Edward. "I was very nearly sick myself."
- "And I, unhappily, am apt to faint," Blanche murmured.



Dut this soon was dis to her comn misdemeanou the engageme ward Vavasou the lofty-min were as sever enced, was ol he expressed pledged himse the compact sh "I do not w Godfrey, "beca dress; but if y ward him the no I cannot exactly gather from your statement, whether he has acted well or ill towards you. I suspect the latter; and, if so—but I will suspend my judgment, until I hear from your own lips, the whole and precise truth. And we are beggars, and disgraced! My poor, poor Blanche. For myself, I can bear this reverse of fortune; but, on your account, the prospect almost drives me mad."

A great deal more in the same style had Godfrey written; and Blanche wept bitterly whilst perusing this evidence of his distress: she trembled, also, when she reflected on the rage which would possess her brother's spirit, should he ever ascertain the truth respecting Edward. Could Godfrey but suspect how Edward had insulted her—but that, of course, should never be; and she rejoiced that her narrative had not been more explicit.

"Well Blanche," said Harriet, "what does Godfrey tell you? Is he coming soon to England? And how often has he lost that roving heart of his, since he has been away? Now don't frown. You know Godfrey has been in love twenty times, at the very least, since we parted. All men are so fickle and versatile in their attachments, that even my superlative charms would fail of ensuring constancy. Depend upon it, therefore, your brother has been in and out of love, at least twenty times, since he left England."

As Harriet made this sally purely in the spirit of coquetry, and as that spirit was perfectly evident; both she and Blanche were rather surprised when Edward, instead of replying to the challenge, repeated the lively widow's first interrogation, by asking earnestly, whether Godfrey would be soon at home?

"My brother holds out that hope;" our heroine answered. Then, reflecting that Godfrey had desired her to transmit to Edward his ratification of their compact; and feeling, that to speak upon the subject would be almost impossible, she offered the letter to him, saying, as the major portion of the contents related to family affairs nearly concerning him, he would, perhaps, give himself the trouble of reading it.

Edward looked very much surprised; but taking the packet from her hand, walked towards the window, and began its perusal.

Five minutes afterwards, some morning visiters were shewn into the room; and when the confusion produced by their entrance had subsided, Blanche found her brother's letter lying by her work-box. Edward had placed it there, and disappeared; she had, therefore, no opportunity of ascertaining in what manner Godfrey's communication affected him; nor did he offer any allusion to the subject during the remainder of the day. Blanche felt perplexed and hurt.

"Does he purpose writing to me?" she asked herself: "or will he treat the subject with contemptuous silence?"

Neither was Mr. Vavasour's intention. On vol. III.

the morrow, he entered the summer-house, already mentioned, where Blanche was sitting; and where, in truth, she was accustomed to spend no inconsiderable portion of her time.

- " Harriet is in the drawing-room," she said.
- "Miss Vavasour," he answered, "will you favour me with ten minutes' conversation?"
- "No;" Blanche replied faintly; "at least, I would rather be excused."
- "As a member of your family, as one interested for your welfare——"
- "Mr. Vavasour," interrupted Blanche, "I am unhappy, ill, unfit for business. Godfrey will be in England soon; and he will arrange every thing with you. I cannot, indeed I cannot, speak upon a subject so painful to my feelings. You have read my brother's letter, you see that he is willing to redeem the pledge I gave, and you accepted—let that satisfy you. And do not press on my consideration, circumstances which bow me to the very earth with shame.'

Blanche grew excited as she spoke; and Edward stood perplexed, irresolute. He could not bring himself to leave her in that state of agitation; and yet, what comfort could his presence prove? He stood, then, irresolute and silent, with his eyes bent on the ground. A few seconds, and Miss Vavasour became comparatively calm.

"I beg your pardon for this display of folly. Yes, folly is the appropriate term. Is not all feeling folly? Harriet would tell you so." And Blanche tried to smile; but the endeavour proved abortive; and the expression which her features subsequently wore, was almost ghastly.

"Blanche," said Edward, "Blanche, will you suffer me to say two words to you?"

"Yes," she answered in a low whisper.
"Yes; say what you please. I can—I will listen. Only remember, for your own sake, remember, that he who wrought your injury and our degradation, can injure you no more.

Speak gently of him. He wronged you fearfully; but he is gone to answer for his crime; while, on the heads of us, his children, the consequences of that sin have fallen. Poverty, disgrace—

"Nay," interrupted Edward, "not poverty, still less disgrace. Your father's misfortune, cannot, at least—it ought not, reflect on you. And as regards fortune—it was on that subject I was anxious to speak; for there is a passage in your brother's letter which leads me to suppose that you are ignorant of the conditions of my reputed father's Will. Is this so? or, are you aware, that according to that Will, you, and each of your brothers are entitled to bequests which must, at any rate, place all idea of want out of the question."

" I know nothing of Mr. Vavasour's Will."

"He bequeathed twenty thousand pounds to you. Ten to your eldest brother besides other property; and half that sum to Arthur."

While listening to this communication,

Blanche's countenance lit up, and she answered with some animation,

"I rejoice to learn that it will be in my power to discharge my debt to you."

"To me, how are you indebted to me?"

"When I implored you to suspend your endeavours to recover your inheritance, I pledged myself that you should be no loser by the delay I begged for. I did not then suspect, that, living as we did, my father could expend a tithe of his annual income; nor was it until after his decease that I became aware how much mistaken I had been. His affairs were left in great disorder; far from amassing wealth, he has, I fear, contracted debts. I possess no means to repay the money of which you have been defrauded; and I will confess that this conviction has added, not a little, to my anxiety and grief. Still, if I am, indeed, entitled to the sum you mention, it will, in a great measure satisfy your claim; and Godfrey, I am well assured, will gladly make good the deficiency."

"Miss Vavasour, you are very unforgiving; I might almost say, vindictive; indeed you are. What is it but the spirit of resentment which impels you at this moment? You have not forgotten, you cannot forgive my intemperance and harshness; and by making a proposal which, you know, will be most distressing to my feelings, you revenge the wound I once, unhappily, inflicted on yours."

"I assure you I am not actuated by the spirit of revenge; but I incurred a debt, and to discharge it is, surely, nothing but an act of probity."

"And do you imagine that I will accept this money? Suffer you to sacrifice your interests to a fanciful impression held by yourself alone?— Never!"

"You will pain me by refusing to receive it. However, there needs no further discussion of this matter, just at present; Godfrey will be in England soon and he will arrange it for me. Would, oh would, that he had been here

"Blanche checked herself; and turning from Edward, fixed her gaze upon the sea which lay before her, one vast sheet of dark unbroken blue.

"Blanche—Miss Vavasour, I may not call you Blanche, for though we are relations, you will not look on me as such."

"I did so once; and well did you requite my foolish and romantic confidence," Blanche answered; yet hardly had she spoken, ere she regretted and would joyfully have recalled language, in Edward's present mood, assuredly not generous.

"I was to blame, fearfully to blame. Still, could you but guess half that I have suffered from remorse and shame; how bitterly my heart reproaches me; you would not upbraid—Nay, I believe, you would rather feel compassion."

"And yet it is but a few nights since, that you suspected me of conduct, at once, sordid and ungrateful." As Blanche spoke, she slowly turned towards Edward. He could not endure to meet her soft, sorrowful eyes, and he almost writhed with anguish as he answered,

" Listen to me, Blanche, only for five minutes, and listen kindly; for I do not speak to justify my conduct, nor even to obtain your pardon; that, I fear, is hopeless; but during our interview, there was one circumstance which influenced me more than it should have done: but which, if duly estimated might, possibly, lead you to judge me with greater indulgence. Remember the wound you formerly inflicted on my feelings; and judge, if you can, how much that wound tortured me. I was a proud man-one, who had been always courted and caressed; a child, a boy, a youth, a man, I had never experienced one mortifying check, until you scornfully rejected me. Yes-from you, my haughty spirit received its first lesson of humility. I have had many since; but none occasioned pangs such as I endured on the

perusal of your letter.—It nearly maddened me. Yet not from pride alone did my sharpest agony arise.-No, no, it was not irritated pride which suffered; it was the love I bore you, Blanche; love, which you cannot estimate; you do not know, none but myself can know, its depth and earnestness. But you rejected my affection, trampled my feelings under foot, mortified my pride; and the wound was still rankling at my heart when our interview took place. Aye, and in spite of all that happened, although I believed that in requital of my love you had leagued with your father for my ruin, though still misjudging you, I thought the attempt you made to work upon my feelings was merely an abuse of former influence-"

" Mr. Vavasour, indeed, you greatly wronged me."

"I know it—I know it. I am sensible I wronged you. In that, as in the transfer of the jewels, I have judged you most unfairly. But, in spite of my erroneous judgment, even

when biassed by that false impression, at the time when the roughness of my manner betokened more than estrangement, even then, I say, there was a struggle in my breast which proved my old feelings, my old attachment, existed still. Oh, for the sake of that affection, think of my after conduct with the indulgence it so much requires. I do not ask you to forgive me; but to judge my fault with mildness and with charity. Blanche, say that you will; tell me, that you will, at least, endeavour to think gently of me."

Blanche extended her hand. Could she do less? Edward's eyes were dim with tears, and his voice broken, and hoarse. She offered him her hand in token of forgiveness; and while he yet held it between his, Harriet appeared at the entrance of the summer-house. Naturally enough, she seemed more astonished than well pleased.

"Will you walk?" said Edward, recovering his embarrassment. "Will you venture on the beach? I came that way, and found the sands quite available. Nay, do not refuse me; you know I am for town, to-morrow; so this will be our last ramble. Besides, I have something to say; a family secret to confide."

Harriet appeared unwilling; but Edward placed her hand beneath his arm, and led her down the steps communicating with the beach.

"What will he tell her? What is this family secret? Not, surely, my father's lamentable history; and yet, there is no other. Yes, he will purchase Harriet's pardon, for she is certainly displeased, by that disclosure. Well, she is generous; and if the story goes no farther, Edward, perhaps, is right in telling her; she has a claim to all his confidence: at least, she will have, soon."

Blanche spent a few minutes in thought; then, slowly walked towards the house. Mrs. Brownlow was, happily, engaged with visiters; and she felt herself at full liberty to seek her own apartment. She wanted rest—quiet; but she found neither. Her mind was in a perfect whirl: the scene she had just gone through; Edward's words, his expressions, every gesture he had used, were present to her thoughts; and in this distressing state of feeling, she could discern but one source of comfort—Mr. Vavasour's proximate departure.

"When he is gone," she said, "there will, perhaps, be rest for me."

Blanche's head ached violently; so violently, as to afford a pretext for remaining in her room that evening. In fact, she did not quit it for some days. Harassed and agitated, a nervous fever followed her interview with Edward; and when sufficiently recovered to leave her chamber, she found the family party smaller than before—Edward had taken his departure; and Mrs. Brownlow was on the eve of doing as much.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HARRIET," said Mrs. Brownlow to her daughter, the evening previous to their separation, "will you be ruled for once, by one who knows a little more of human nature than you do?"

" Well, mama?"

"Give up this foolish scheme of having Blanche to live with you. Her being here now, may be all well enough, because you want a companion. But after you are married, her constant residence beneath your roof would be, believe me, both unwise and unnecessary. I can't conceive what could have made you think of such a thing."

" Mama, as I am to marry the representative

of Blanche's family, and as she cannot always find a home with her brother, seeing, he will be half his life at sea, it appeared to me not only natural, but just, that she should live with me, even setting aside our old friendship and the pleasure her society confers on me."

"A pleasure which may, one day, turn to pain. Pray, if she supplants you in Mr. Vavasour's affection, will it be pain, or pleasure that you derive from her companionship?"

" Mama," said Harriet, impatiently,
"Blanche's principles—Mr. Vavasour's principles—"

"Are the principles of frail human nature. Blanche is a very captivating girl; and believe me, Harriet, you will act most imprudently if you throw her constantly in Edward's way."

"There is no danger. Edward, himself, objects to her living with us."

"Indeed! And on what pretext?"

"Oh, you know, men very often object to having a third person in the house. Besides, he says, he doesn't imagine she would like to live with us: nor, to say the truth, do I."

"I rejoice to hear it. And I most sincerely trust, that both Blanche and Edward Vavasour may remain in the same mind. An occasional visit may be feasible enough, but nothing further. Remember, how she carried off Lord Warleigh. Before he knew Blanche, he was very much inclined to admire you; but from the moment he saw her, there was an end of your ever being Lady Warleigh."

- "Mama, I would not have married Lord Warleigh, if he had asked me twenty times!"
- "That does not signify. Blanche drew away your admirer, and she may do as much by your husband, if you are not watchful."
- "Do you know, I suspect Lord Warleigh still admires Blanche."
 - " I fear not."
- "What keeps him, then, so long with his tiresome old mother?"
 - "Has he been there long?"

"Three weeks at the very least; and during those three weeks, he has been here constantly. Now he doesn't come to see me, because he knows I am engaged to Edward; I suppose you are not his object. Blanche, therefore, must be."

"I wish with all my heart she may. I should be glad, exceedingly glad, to see her married to so excellent a young man."

"Then, why don't you further his suit? You may so easily give it a helping hand during your visit to his mother."

"I am no matchmaker," Harriet smiled. "I dislike matchmaking: nothing should ever induce me to make, or meddle, in such matters," Mrs. Brownlow answered; nevertheless, during a visit of two days which she bestowed on Lady Warleigh, she did and said everything prudence and propriety permitted to bring the young Peer back to Blanche's feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN left alone with Harriet, Blanche found herself far happier than she had been for months, almost, it might be said, for years. Godfrey was on his way home; Edward, she knew, thought kindly of her; the uninterrupted quiet of the life she led soothed and revived her spirits, while the mild sea breezes invigorated her frame and restored the soft, transparent bloom, which formerly had flushed her cheek.

But not so, Mrs. Greville. She drooped in mind and looks; every unpleasant symptom of her malady appeared on the increase; her natural kind and cheerful temper became peevish; her manner towards Blanche, uncer-

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"Three weeks those three were she would Now he does other da knows I am a mild, reserve you are not ber friend. must be.31 "I wis pined for E should he appeared to yi married (a thin first peru "Then trained it was You may this well into h during that he "I am mental dislike duce m Mrs. I a visit Lady prude youn

any service. Don't, therefore, teaze me by proposing medical advice. 'Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it!' 's said Harriet, with a faint revival of her characteristic vivacity.

Mrs. Greville's gaiety lasted during the remainder of the day. And had not Blanche's penetration told her that her friend's spirits were assumed, she might have been deceived respecting the invalid's actual condition. But, aware that Harriet's cheerfulness was entirely factitious, she experienced no surprise when, on the following morning, almost before daybreak, she was summoned to the invalid, and found her in a state of frightful excitement.

"Blanche," exclaimed Harriet, "I want you to write a letter for me to Edward Vavasour."

"To Edward Vavasour?"

"Yes. You must write and beg him to come down here instantly. If he wishes to see me alive, he must not lose a single moment." tain. Sometimes, indeed, she would evince the kindliness and gaiety of other days; but far, far, oftener was she cold, reserved, fractious.

Blanche grew uneasy for her friend. It could scarcely be that Harriet pined for Edward's society, for his letters appeared to yield her little satisfaction; or if their first perusal did induce a happier frame of mind, it was evanescent; Harriet speedily relapsed into her original depression; thus proving that her suffering arose from corporeal, not mental causes.

"Harriet," said Blanche, one day, "I wish you would suffer me to write to Mrs. Brownlow; you are more ailing than when she left us; and I feel that she ought to be acquainted with the change. Let me write—pray do."

"No, no; mama could do no good; she would only worry and annoy me."

"Then see Dr. L. Or let me write in your name to your London Physician,"

" No, Blanche. Neither would be

proposing medical advice. 'Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it!' " said Harriet, with a faint revival of her characteristic vivacity.

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" Dearest Harriet-"

"But don't write to mama."

"I may not write to Mrs. Brownlow?"

"No. I forbid you. I positively forbid your sending for her; at least, at present. I must see him; but my mother—no, I cannot bear to see her now. To have her, with all her worldliness of feeling and opinion, polluting my sick room; strewing my dying bed with ashes; keeping my spirit down to earth, instead of raising it to that world where I soon must be...Blanche, it is an awful thing to die! Yes, I know what you will answer; you will tell me, as you have already done, of that which can smooth the passage to the grave, throw a radiance over that dark valley which I so soon must tread."

Harriet paused and shuddered.

"But I cannot listen now. I must see Edward. Afterwards, when my mind is calmer, you shall talk to me, read to me, do any thing you like. Only send for him. I would write myself, but my hand trembles so."

Blanche obeyed her friend's behest, and wrote to Edward.

Weary—most weary, was the interval of time which necessarily intervened between the despatch of her letter and Mr. Vavasour's arrival. Harriet's captiousness appeared every hour to augment, and it was hard for Blanche to bear the caprice, sometimes the superciliousness, that her friend's manner evidenced. But Mrs. Greville was clearly suffering from an increase of her malady; the crimson spot which burnt upon her cheek—the excessive brightness of her eye—the delicacy of her features, together with the transparent whiteness of her hand, were tokens not to be mistaken by one only too well versed in the diagnostics of consumption.

Blanche saw all Harriet's danger, and trembled for her. Her decease was evidently near at hand; and was she in a fitting state to die? It was impossible to answer favourably. Her whole life had been one of dissipation and amusement. She had not, it is true, inflicted positive injury on any one; she had not broken any of those laws which civilized man professes to obey; she had violated no actual duty; she was even less selfish, less false, less worldly-minded, and more kind-hearted, than many whose mode of life was similar to hers. But what good had she accomplished? In what way had she benefited her fellow mortals? How dispensed the wealth bestowed on her? and which had not been given (it is not given to any one) for simply selfish purposes. If Harriet had not done harm, neither had she done righteously. Viewed in the most charitable and most favourable point of view, her virtues had been negative. And will such suffice, when summoned to appear before the dread tribunal of a God in whose sight, even the stars of heaven are not pure, and who

will reckon for the idle word — the sinful thought?

Blanche prayed for Harriet; she wept for her; and, more than once, essayed to turn her mind to self-examination; but Harriet invariably checked her.

"I cannot think of these things now. When I've seen Edward, you shall talk to me; at least, if I can bear it. But not now—I cannot listen. My mind is full of other thoughts. Now don't teaze me any more, Blanche. I know your meaning's kind; but—but—at present, I can't bear discussion of any sort." She would answer peevishly.

Miss Vavasour and Edward did not meet. She was in the garden when he arrived; and on returning to the house, was told that he had been conducted straight to Mrs. Greville's boudoir: and after remaining there for nearly two hours, he rushed down stairs, and from the house, without appearing to remember either Blanche's existence or her absence.

She was proceeding to Harriet's room, when the lady's maid met and prevented her. Exhausted by her long interview with Mr. Vavasour, Mrs. Greville requested to be left quite alone. She wished, if possible, to sleep; and would ring when requiring attendance, or equal to society.

The hours passed on; twilight gathered in, and Harriet's summons had been waited for in vain. At length, unable to master her anxiety, Blanche softly undid the door and crept on tiptoe to the sofa where lay the invalid. She was sleeping; her head had almost fallen from the pillow; and she was pale, so pale, that, for a moment, Blanche feared that the spirit had escaped its earthly habitation. An involuntary expression of distress awoke the heavy slumberer.

"What is that?" cried Harriet to her waiting-woman; and apparently, without remarking Blanche.

"A note, Ma'am; a note from Mr. Vava-

sour. He brought it himself, and is waiting for an answer at the gate. William says he declined coming in."

Harriet tore open and read the note. Then, calling for writing materials, endeavoured to indite a reply; but weakness prevented her.

"I cannot," she said, pettishly, throwing the pen aside; "I cannot write. How tiresome! Benson, you must see Mr. Vavasour, and tell him, from me, that I am better—much better—than when he saw me last; and that, on no account, would I have him delay returning to London."

And having said this, Harriet relapsed into the state of drowsiness from which Blanche had, unwittingly, awakened her.

It continued during many hours; and when, at length, shaken off, Mrs. Greville appeared borne down by languor and depression.

"Blanche," she began, a few days afterwards,
"I wear you, terribly. I know I do. But

forgive me; and bear with me a little longer; for, in spite of everything, I love you dearly. And I feel all your tenderness and kindness, and-" Harriet added, smiling, "your patience and forbearance. I am aware I have tried both, severely; and may again. But it is my infirmity. So, dearest, you will bear with me-I feel assured you will. It cannot be for long. Besides, I am very, very, miserable: for, I am dying, and oh, it is an awful thing to dieto leave this world with all its brilliant fascinations; to part with those we love, and those by whom we are beloved; to lay the body in the cold, cold, grave; while the spirit, naked, shivering and alone, enters a region all unknown and unexplored-Blanche, this is horrible !"

Harriet shuddered as she spoke; and Blanche, shocked by her emotion, and terrified for its consequences, scarcely ventured to prolong the conversation.

"Could you die happily?" Harriet asked ab-

ruptly. "Yes, I believe you could. But you are, and always were, so unlike me. Heaven would be your appropriate dwelling place; while earth, base grovelling earth, alone suits me."

"Dearest Harriet, my lot in life is not, never has been, and, perhaps, never will be, such as to make me love this world. From my earliest infancy, Trial and I have been, not friends exactly, but intimate acquaintances. It is not, therefore, wonderful that I could resign this life with greater ease than you, whose whole existence has been bright with blessings."

"Blanche," said Harriet, hastily, "my destiny is not, in all things, so superior to yours, as you imagine. In one respect, you have been the most highly favoured."

"In having been more tried? Well, perhaps, you may be right. Afflictions are, it is said, blessings in disguise."

"It will be long before I subscribe to that

opinion: and it was to a blessing, a positive, unquestionable blessing, that I alluded. You have been loved by Edward Vavasour; I have not," Harriet answered; while an expression of excessive bitterness contracted her features.

"Harriet," said Blanche, gravely, "if you value, I will not say, your happiness, but his, do not, pray do not, suffer that notion to impress your mind."

" Edward's happiness is nothing to me."

"The happiness of the man you are engaged to marry, nothing to you, Harriet?"

"I am not engaged to marry Edward Vavasour. Our engagement is dissolved—annihilated!"

"Since when?"

"Since Thursday. It was for the purpose of breaking it that I sent for him."

"You astonish me !"

"Yes," pursued Mrs. Greville; "I have broken with him; everything is at an end between us—and now that the contract is dissolved, dissolved for ever, I feel, that in discarding Edward Vavasour, I made a sacrifice whose extent I did not suspect until, until, too late."

"Oh, no," cried Blanche, "it is not too late. You have acted rashly in discarding Edward: but it is not too late to renew your engagement."

"Not for the whole universe would I renew it. Do you suppose, I would marry a man who loves another?"

"He does not, dearest Harriet; indeed, he

"Read his last letter, Blanche. See how he speaks of you, even while urging the continuance of our engagement. Well, can you understand it? He esteems, and admires, me; but did *love* you. What does that mean?"

"Simply, that Edward, once, entertained a passing predilection for me."

"Passing predilection? Pooh, Blanche! A

commit himself by proposing to a girl, merely because he feels a passing predilection in her favour."

"How do you know, that he did propose?"

"Because he told me so."

"When?"

"That day, when you were together in the summer-house; and I made that singularly mal à propos entrance."

"Nay, Harriet, our conversation related to a family feud. Indeed, the idea of recurring to former feelings never entered into either of our minds. Nor must it yours: for, listen to me; whatever Edward's sentiments towards me may have been, once, they have since partaken of the harshest, most unfriendly, character; and besides this, there is a barrier between us, which must, for ever, prevent our being more than friends."

"But that is no reason why I should marry a man who does not care for me."

"He is attached to you."

"I tell you, no. At least, not as I must be loved. If he had been, do you think he would have acted as he did at Rome?"

"He was prompted by a sense of honour."

"Fiddlestick! When a man is really in love, he is not apt to suffer a romantic notion of honour to come between him and the woman he is attached to. To confess the truth, I have never felt quite satisfied with the reality of his affection, since that time: but mama's assurance—you know it was she who managed the negociation—overcame my doubts, and I suffered an engagement to take place. Almost from the moment, however, of your being here together, my misgivings returned; and when he told me of his old attachment, it was no longer doubt, but certainty, I felt. wanted then to put an end to the engagement: but he would not hear of it, nor would mama. And, as you are aware, Blanche, that I always was the meekest and most manageable being in the world, I yielded."

"And why have you since discarded Edward?"

"Oh, dearest Blanche, the matter weighed upon my spirits. You have seen how much worse I have been, lately. And then, I find that old Mr. Vavasour has left some strange passage in his Will, desiring Edward to marry you: you are to have twenty thousand pounds if he does not."

"Mr. Vavasour left those instructions in his Will?"

"Yes, my dear. And, do you know, I have sometimes thought, that if, instead of you, I should go down to Newstoke Priors as a bride, the old gentleman might not altogether approve of it. Moreover, as he was always rather eccentric in his way of going on, it is just possible, that he might take it into his head to come and tell me so. Now, if you go—"

"Harriet, how can you jest upon a subject of such importance?"

- "Because, grave Blanche, now that I have told you all this history, my heart is lighter than it has been for many a day."
 - " Still, we cannot marry."
- "That was Edward's argument. He talked of some obstacle, but desired me not to question him about it; which I thought rather odd, considering how magnanimously I had acted. And, pray, am I not to ask you, either?"
- "Harriet," said Blanche, after a momentary and most painful pause, "I am a felon's daughter! You know the pride of Edward's character; judge, whether he would ever unite himself to me?"
- "A felon's daughter!" faintly ejaculated Harriet, while her parted lips and straining eyes betrayed how infinitely she was shocked. "A felon's daughter?"
- "Will you despise me, cast me away from you?" Harriet flung her arms round Blanche's neck; perhaps, the more fervently from the conviction that she never could be Edward's wife.

" A felon's daughter! Tell, oh, tell me, how?"

And the tale was told; told with the blush of shame, the faltering tone of deep humiliation; and heard with the tear of ready sympathy and oft repeated pledge of continued friendship.

- "You will be dearer to me from this very circumstance," said Harriet, again embracing Blanche.
 - "You will not betray my misfortune?"
- " Not one syllable of this lamentable story shall ever pass my lips."
 - " Did Edward never hint at it?"
- "Never; and perhaps his want of confidence, in this respect, served to open my eyes. At all events, it rendered me less anxious about our marriage. I, by no means, fancy those reserved, majestic, blue beard, sort of husbands, who treat their wives as if they were little children. No, no; openness, entire confidence for me."
 - " Godfrey," said Blanche, involuntarily.

- "No; Godfrey would not suit me, either. We are too much alike. But I tell you what, Blanche, neither you nor I will ever marry. We will live together all our lives, and be very happy, and exhibit to the admiring world a perfect specimen of feminine celibacy. If we were Roman Catholics, we might go into some convent; but being Protestants, we must rest satisfied with this place, or Westbourne."
- " Dearest Harriet, what immense elasticity of spirits you have."
- " I believe, my spirits do rise easily; but they fall every whit the same. In the sky one moment, below the earth, the next. To-morrow, in every probability, I shall be as miserable, as I was half an hour ago."

CHAPTER XXIII.

But she was not. Her mind relieved from the weight which pressed upon it, recovered its natural buoyancy; the nervous fever gradually disappeared, and improvement of the general health followed. It is true, that Mrs. Greville was yet liable to fits of depression; that she was still, sometimes, a little peevish and contradictory towards Blanche; but, throughout the winter, the amendment continued to progress, and the spring found her nearly as gladsome as its own sweet birds.

Blanche, too, was happier, for Godfrey had arrived in England; and, as was quite natural, spent most part of his time in the Isle of Wight. Not so Mrs. Brownlow. She had learnt the dissolution of her daughter's engagement with Mr. Vavasour with infinite dissatisfaction; and when, to the chagrin engendered by this disappointment, was added the circumstance of Godfrey's return, and his almost domestication in Mrs. Greville's house, nearly frantic with alarm, she set out for the Isle of Wight.

- "You are too late, mama," said Harriet laughing, "you are just two hours too late.
 Only this afternoon I have promised to—"
- "Marry Mr. Godfrey Vavasour, and make a beggar of yourself. Harriet, you will drive me mad. Such folly—such inconceivable folly."
- "Mama, I consider that I am about to do the wisest thing I ever did in my whole life."

 Mrs. Brownlow did not condescend to answer.
- "Will you tell me," pursued her daughter,

 "in what respect I am likely to compromise
 my claim to sense and wisdom by marrying an

amiable, well-born man, to whom I am very much attached; and who, positively, worships me?"

- " Worships-attached-bah!"
- "I have plenty of money, and Captain Vavasour is not devoid of fortune, as you must be aware. His cousin, Mr. Vavasour of Newstoke, left him a legacy of ten thousand pounds, besides landed property."
- " And supposing he did, is that a fitting match for you?"
 - " I think so; and Godfrey agrees with me."
- "I have no doubt he does; and so, perhaps, does that hypocritical sister of his; at whose door, by the way, we may no doubt lay all this unfortunate business. Yes; it is Blanche's fault entirely."
- "Blanche has promised to be bridesmaid," said the provoking Harriet, "and the marriage is to take place, as soon as propriety allows. You know, I have been the most decorous widow possible to conceive."

- "Very decorous indeed. First, you go and offer yourself to a man; then, break your engagement, for no imaginable earthly reason. And four months after, I find you plighted to another."
- "It's not four months, mama; it's only fifteen weeks since I discarded Edward Vavasour. By the bye, have you seen any thing of him latterly?"
- "Nothing; he has never been near me since the breach of your engagement."
 - " Do you think he resents it?"
- "Of course, he does. I should like to know what man would not? And pray," continued Mrs. Brownlow, after a minute's silence; "pray, may I inquire, what is to become of Miss Vavasour?"
- " She is to marry, I suppose; according to the common and most approved custom of young ladies."
- "But until she marries, where is she to live? Not with you, I trust?"

- " Godfrey cannot very well fall in love with his sister, I believe,"
- "He may, however, be very much under his sister's influence; and, therefore, I consider her residence with you, by no means advisable."
- "It is not to be. Godfrey and I, think of going abroad. We mean to spend the next winter at Rome; and Blanche fancies it her duty to remain in England."
 - " How, her duty?"
- "That old aunt of hers, Miss Bransby, has had a quarrel with her dearly beloved pet, Arthur; in consequence of which, they have parted company, and the poor old lady finds her life so sad and lonely, that Blanche thinks she ought to take compassion on her."
- "Blanche is quite right. I only hope Arthur and his aunt won't make up their differences. What was their quarrel?"
- "Something about his legacy, I believe. He wanted to spend his money according to

his own fancy; and Miss Bransby wanted to spend it for him. So after wrangling for some time, they separated."

- "Blanche comes in for something handsome, does she not?"
 - " She won't accept it."
- "Is that possible?" said Mrs. Brownlow, throwing up her eyes.
- "A positive fact. And neither Godfrey, nor I, can even guess her reason."
- "I should imagine, she could not have a reason to guess. At all events, no reason consonant with common sense."

Possibly, Blanche's conduct, in this instance, was not altogether reasonable. Still, she continued to resist; very much to the annoyance of the astute Mrs. Brownlow, who, feeling that as Harriet chose to marry a man of inferior fortune, it was most important that his sister should be handsomely provided for, evinced considerable anxiety respecting Miss Vavasour's pecuniary interests; and she argued un-

weariedly to persuade Blanche; resting, mainly, on her conviction, that if Blanche persisted in her refusal, Edward would imagine she was piqued by his non-fufilment of his father's wishes respecting her.

But Blanche was very obstinate. She could not forgive the scruple Edward had expressed to Harriet. She had, undoubtedly, suspected that he would have shrunk from a connexion with the daughter of a man sullied by the commission of a capital offence; still, he need not have spoken so decidedly. Harriet had not been influenced by similar considerations; although, in a woman, such fastidiousness would be more excusable, than in a man. For, in marrying, a woman sinks to the level of her husband's station; but it is not so with the superior sex.

Blanche, therefore, was very unpersuadable; and it was not until she learnt that it was to Edward she owed all the kindness she had experienced at Conyngsby; that he had directed her father's funeral, had even followed as principal mourner; that not only had he accepted her aunt Letitia's draft; but that he continued the annuity, leading the old lady to suppose, she received it as a matter of right, that she consented to accept the legacy; or, as in her own mind she termed this act of condescension, to cancel the engagement she had contracted.

It was decided that the arrangements for Harriet's second wedding should be as quiet as her first had been ostentatious. Blanche, with a daughter of Lord Daventry's, were to be bridesmaids. Miss Bransby, the only other guest invited; and, as might have been expected, greatly enchanted with the marriage.

Despite, however, her joy on this felicitous occasion, poor Miss Bransby was very far from what she used to be. Arthur's misconduct had cut her to the heart, and she looked so black, and shrunk, and dried away, that when, on their first meeting, she threw herself into

her niece's arms, Blanche, almost expected to feel her crumble into dust, like the shrivelled kernel of a nut.

"Did you ever see anything so altered, as my aunt Letitia?" said Blanche to Godfrey they had crossed over to Southampton to meet their relative—" So thin, too; she looks, literally all bonnet and cloak. I declare, if the wind freshens, I shall expect to see her blown away."

"Certainly, she would not be the worse for more ballast; and the wind is getting up. However, I hope we shall contrive to get her across."

Miss Bransby was not blown away; but considerably frightened. She entertained as great a dread of steam vessels, as some persons now feel respecting railway carriages; and the passage proving somewhat boisterous, her subjects for apprehension were manifold. There was too much steam; the pressure was, she felt confident, greater than could be consistent with safety; the vessel lent a little on one side; and it stood to reason that, with one paddle half out of the water, the risk of going over altogether was excessive. Why were the sails hoisted? She imagined that steam superseded the necessity for sails; and, as Godfrey refused to interfere, she was vexed and unhappy. Then something had been said about a little boat; they were to land in a little boat—a dreadful prospect! She was sure to miss her footing, and slip into the sea.

"Blanche," whispered Godfrey, "when next you cross the water with our poor old relative, I should advise your putting her into a covered basket."

Harriet and Godfrey passed over to France immediately. Mrs. Brownlow and Miss Daventry returned to the metropolis; while Blanche and her aunt Letitia set off for their future home.

Blanche had not contemplated her residence with Miss Bransby, with any rapturous expectation;—a thousand times would she have preferred accompanying Godfrey and his bride to the continent—and this dissatisfaction augmented inexpressibly, on her being made aware that her aunt Letitia's future residence lay, actually, within a few miles of Newstoke Priors. It happened that part of the property bequeathed to Godfrey, consisted of a house and garden, which he made over to Miss Bransby; and here, Blanche learnt that she and her aged relative were to locate themselves.

But, however, Miss Vavasour might dislike the plan, she had no reasonable objection to advance against it; and she endeavoured to reconcile herself to the prospect, by the hope that Edward Vavasour would be very little in that neighbourhood. It was said, he had conceived so strong an aversion to the family place, that he had almost resolved on parting with it; at all events, nothing would tempt him to reside there permanently; and Blanche trusted that he would adhere to this determination.

"Well," said Miss Bransby, when, on the second afternoon of their journey, they found themselves in an old fashioned mansion, whose exterior exhibited more picturesque beauty than regularity, and whose internal arrangement gave promise of solid, substantial, comfort, rather than elegance. "Well, I declare this is a very nice snug place, indeed. And I dare say, we shall find everything extremely comfortable here. Don't you think so, my dear Blanche?"

Blanche assented; she was rather taken with the aspect of her new home.

"And then, it is very convenient being so near Newstoke Priors; for, of course, Mr. Edward will order venison, and fruit, and game, and all that sort of thing, to be sent continually; besides often giving us the pleasure of his society when he is at home. And, really, he is a very pretty behaved young gentleman, taking him altogether. To be sure, his running off in that way, just when I was ex-

pecting him to dinner wasn't quite genteel; but we must make allowances for young men, and I dare say he wouldn't do so, now. My dear, what do you think we ought to do about letting him know of our arrival?"

- "Nothing." Blanche answered, shortly; then perceiving considerable surprise on Miss Bransby's countenance, she added, "Mr. Vavasour is not in ——shire, now."
- "Well, if he's not at Newstoke, there would be no use in sending for him, of course. How do you know?"
- "Godfrey told me, Mr. Vavasour dislikes the place, and never means to be there, but from necessity."
- "Very odd, very odd, indeed. Are you quite sure?"
 - " I have given you my authority."
- "Yes; but Godfrey's mind was so full of Harriet, that half his time there was no making head or tail of him. I tried ever so often to get him to explain how it is that the

property goes back to Edward; and really, he was so confused, and unsatisfactory in his statements, that I was no wiser than I was before. And as to you, Blanche, I am sorry to observe, that you have got into such a habit of dreaming away your life, that you seem to me never to know anything; even Mrs. Flaxman's terrible disappointment in losing her little boy—you didn't actually know that, although I saw it in the newspaper, myself A very bad habit it is, indeed, this custom of always living in a dream."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next day, Blanche underwent another lecture on this subject. Miss Bransby heard that Edward Vavasour was at Newstoke Priors; and our heroine's patience was nearly exhausted, by her aunt's incessant recurrence to her apathetic ignorance; varied, only, by speculations respecting the most eligible mode of informing Mr. Vavasour of their arrival. He ought, certainly, to be advised. And the point at issue with Miss Bransby was, whether a verbal or a written message should be sent. The latter was decided on; and Blanche desired to employ her pen. She declined, gently.

- "I suppose, then, I must do it, myself;" said the old lady; "and yet, I think, at my age, I might be spared the exertion."
- "Edward Vavasour will hear of our arrival quite soon enough; and if he never hears it, it is not of much consequence. I imagine, Mr. Vavasour cares very little whether we are in his neighbourhood, or not."
- "Blanche, you are sadly altered; sadly, altered, indeed: grown so obstinate, ill-tempered, and conceited. I declare, I can't help wondering at you. However, whether you judge it right or not, I shall write and tell Mr. Vavasour that we are come."
- "Wait, at any rate, until to-morrow or the next day; by that time, perhaps, he will have heard of your being here, and call."

Miss Bransby was not apt to follow any suggestion proposed to her; and, in the present instance, most assuredly, she would not have submitted to her niece's guidance, had not her recent journey induced a degree of lassitude which rendered writing nearly impossible. There was, also, so much to do in settling the house and household; she felt unequal to it all; and the note was deferred.

"There, I shouldn't be surprised, if that should be Mr. Vavasour riding towards the house, just as I was going to write. Well, this is lucky! Blanche, you were right in saying he would come and call. I wish, though, I had thought that he would come to-day; I would have put on a clean cap." And aunt Letitia began settling her head-dress before the looking-glass.

But the visiter was not Edward Vavasour. Mr. Revely was announced; and received from Miss Vavasour an accueil, all but affectionate. His visit was one of mere civility, and lasted nearly half an hour.

"Can I be of any service?" He said, when rising to take leave. "Make me of any use you can. At present, I am on my road to Newstoke—can I do any thing for you there?" "Oh dear yes!" cried Miss Bransby. "If you are going to Newstoke, pray be so good as to inform Mr. Vavasour that we are come, and shall be very happy to see him over here. I was on the point of writing to him. Thank you, thank you, Mr. Revely, for saving me the trouble. At my time of life, writing is not a trifle." And a little angry look was discharged at Blanche.

Miss Bransby put on a gayer cap the next day, and the next day, and the next. But as far as the owner of Newstoke Priors was concerned, her toilet care was fruitless. Not even a card bearing Mr. Vavasour's name was left at Ashurst.

For some time, Miss Letitia felt positive that Mr. Revely had forgotten her message; and more than once, she avowed her determination of repairing the omission; but having ascertained that her commission had been faithfully discharged, Edward, from being a very pretty behaved young gentleman, was by her transmuted into an exceeding ill-bred man: so ill-behaved, indeed, that now she thought of calling him to account for his impertinent behaviour. Happily, however, Blanche hinted at the eccentricity which had characterised the elder Mr. Vavasour; and her aunt caught eagerly at the insinuation.

"Very true, my dear, very true. The Vavasours are an eccentric race, no one can deny it. A touch of madness in the family. The old gentleman must have been a most extraordinary person. And your father, Blanche, your father was certainly a little out of his mind, sometimes; knocked off my cap, you know, that day at Marshampton; besides starving us all. Do you remember what dreadful dinners we used to have in Warwick Street? And then, Arthur—I can't help thinking, that Arthur never would have behaved so bad as he did to me, if he hadn't been a trifle odd. Yes, yes, that's what it is. Eccentricity. I shouldn't be surprised if Mr.

Edward Vavasour were to turn out just as strange and misanthropic as his father was. So we won't think any thing more about his coming here."

Well pleased was Blanche with this determination of Miss Bransby's. Her objection to meeting Edward had been naturally strengthened by the pointed neglect he had displayed; and she dreaded nothing more than the appearance of an advance on their parts.

They had been about a month at Ashurst when his name was announced. Miss Bransby drew herself up, and bestowed on Mr. Vavasour the most freezing curtsey she was capable of giving. Blanche, on the contrary, afraid that a cold reception might be attributed to pique, received him courteously. But Miss Bransby's frigidity did not last long. Edward's manner was so gentlemanlike—he seemed so desirous to please and entertain her, that she forgot, or, at any rate, forgave, his former remissness. Even the ostensible object of the visit gratified

the old lady. Edward was on the point of leaving ——shire, and, considering himself in the light of her landlord, had called to inquire whether Ashurst were entirely to her taste; or if there were any additions or improvements which she considered advantageous.

Now it happened, that Miss Bransby had imagined various alterations. She had lived almost all her life in one small country house; and whatever she had been accustomed to at Marshampton, she coveted at Ashurst; and what she had not been accustomed to at Marshampton, she would gladly have dismissed from Ashurst. In many respects, of course, these fancies were impracticabilities: still, they were suggested. And Blanche, perfectly aware, that Edward was not their landlord, felt her cheeks crimson while her aunt proposed a multitude of changes, many of them unimportant, others unnecessary; yet almost all, troublesome and expensive.

Mr. Vavasour was all complacency. In every

respect, Miss Bransby's wishes should be acted on; and not only were workmen immediately employed, but he twice rode over to inspect their progress.

Blanche did not see much of Edward on either occasion. He was standing about with the workmen; while Miss Bransby flitted backwards and forwards complaining of the fatigue she underwent, and of the risk she ran of catching cold; yet appearing as if her thirst for alteration were as insatiable as her whims were numerous, and her perseverance inexhaustible.

"I am afraid," said Blanche, fairly ashamed, at length, "I fear, Mr. Vavasour, that if you shew so much readiness in listening to my aunt's suggestions, you will find us very troublesome tenants; perhaps, even, feel yourself obliged to serve us with a notice to quit."

"That is not very likely. But even if it were the case, I have not the power of dis-

piacing Miss Bransity. Ashurst does not be-

- "I am aware of it; and very greatly do I wish I much convince my aunt that you are not her landlord: for, indeed, I am afraid you must be zired out with these incessant manages."
 - *On the contrary. I am grateful for them."
- *As affireding you an object of interest? something to think about? I believe many people are find of building."
 - * Have was heard lately from your brother?"
 - "This marning. They are at Baden-Baden."
- "Have in Harrier: Mrs. Vavasour, I mean."
 While an almost imperceptible smile played round his mouth.
 - "Harriet says, she is quite well."
- *And happy?" said Edward, smiling more demokally.
- "Perfectly. Harriet is, you know, very versatile. I have been sometimes tempted to envy the elasticity of her mind."

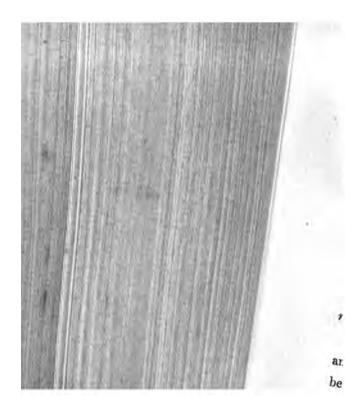
"Mrs. Vavasour has very high animal spirits." He answered coldly.

"Yes; her spirits are buoyant in the extreme; and she has that, which does not always accompany high spirits—strong and deep feelings, coupled with the greatest consideration for those of others."

Edward did not answer; and Blanche, prompted, perhaps, by the spirit of opposition, praised her friend excessively; until, finding him still silent, she added, thought-lessly enough—

"Mr. Vavasour, if you do not join me in admiring Harriet, I shall be tempted to suspect that you are jealous of my brother."

"Then, believe me, you could not fall into a greater error. Godfrey does not possess a more sincere well wisher than I am; nor does there, probably, exist the man, except himself of course, who rejoiced more truly at his marriage with Harriet Greville, than did I. And further," Edward added, "I believe the union



desty than actual pleasure. Edward did not attempt to follow her; nor did he renew the conversation. Had this been his first expression of love most probably he would; but having been once rejected, and therefore easily discouraged, far from repeating, he regretted the words which in an unguarded moment had escaped him.

Many times during the course of that day did Blanche's thoughts revert to those expressions. She endeavoured to forget his words, to drive them from her thoughts; for she could not but remember that at the period to which Edward had referred, the barrier, which he himself had said must ever separate them, existed not. Her own sentiments, also, were of a strange, conflicting, nature; sometimes she thought of him with nearly all her former tenderness; at others with indifference if not dislike; but still, those words came back upon her mind; until, at last, this turmoil settled down into the charitable conclusion, that to bear malice was unchristianlike, and that she

-- hours did he follow his persevering visiter, while she trotted backwards and forwards, up and down stairs, in the house and out of it. Then came luncheon, and then, to his very great relief, she asked for her carriage.

Previous to taking leave, she tendered Mr. Vavasour a card of invitation to dinner.

"I thought I mightn't find you at home, Mr. Edward; so I brought that card to leave, and I may as well give it to you, just by way of reminding you of our dinner hour. Nobody but yourself. We shall be quite alone. Blanche wants to have the Revelys, but I say, till we are more settled in our house it's nonsense to be thinking of giving dinner parties; so I've asked nobody but you. We dine at half past five, precisely. Good afternoon."

"I suppose Miss Blanche did not choose to write my invitation; this is certainly her aunt's handwriting, and the poor old lady might have saved herself the trouble; for, most assuredly, I shall not go, not I!" He did, however. On reconsidering the matter, Edward Vavasour persuaded himself, that as flight argues weakness, his absence might be misconstrued; that, by far his most dignified line of conduct would be indifference; he would dine, therefore, at Ashurst, if it were only to shew Miss Blanche Vavasour how very little he cared about her.

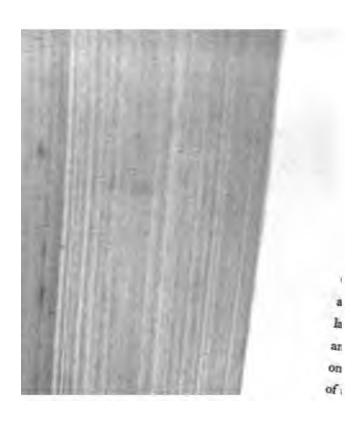
He was not the only guest; the Revely's and Sir John Evelyn, a brother of Mrs. Revely's, had been likewise invited. Perhaps, excepting from the latter circumstance, Edward might not have found his purpose of playing the indifferent, one of easy execution; for, true to her charitable resolution, Blanche met him with great cordiality, and cold indeed had been the heart, and stoical the temper, that could resist her soft, engaging smile. But it appeared to Edward, that the Baronet was very well disposed to devote himself to Blanche; and she, not altogether disinclined, to accept his homage; and he found little difficulty in

accomplishing his purpose. He was as stately, as cold, as indifferent and reserved, as the most ill-used gentleman could possibly appear.

"I will never waste another thought on him," said Blanche that night, while she pettishly threw on her toilet table some of the lighter portion of her dress. "Never, no never, will I suffer his image to occupy my mind again. Why did I ever cherish it? Why, even to this hour—but it is over now; yes, past—gone—vanished! His last hold over me has given way. He is going abroad, it seems; perhaps, therefore, it will be years before we meet again; and long ere that, each vestige of my weakness shall be thoroughly eradicated. My constant, unremitting study shall, from this moment be, to drive him from my thoughts."

And Blanche laid down to sleep, and dreamt

— Nay, let the secret of her slumber still
be kept. It is enough to chronicle the
thoughts and actions of her waking hours.



cloudy. "They are at home then, after all. That foolish old woman was afraid of rain, I suppose. Great nonsense—it's a pity I didn't intimate that I intended calling, and then, at all events, Miss Blanche would have contrived to get out of the way. However, I shan't stay long. Are the ladies at home?"

"One of them is. Please to walk in, Sir," said the servant. And Edward dismounted.

He was shown into the room usually occupied by Blanche. And he grew, at the very least, an inch taller as his eye glanced rapidly from the harp to the drawing-stand; from the book-case to the embroidery frame.

"What's the reason I was brought in here? Mistaken for Sir John Evelyn, I suppose," he said, half aloud, in moody accents. And then his mind underwent one of those singular transitions, which afford philosophers so much ground for speculation.

Blanche had been sketching flowers. A Provençale rose stood in a vase upon her drawing table; and the pure and graceful flower offered no unbefitting emblem of the artist. Edward's poetic fancy caught the association; and, for a moment, gentle emotions nestled at his heart; but soon, too soon, all the fierce pangs of irritated pride swept like a tempest through his mind; and, scarcely knowing what he did, he tore the rose into a thousand pieces.

"Mr. Vavasour, I believe," said a voice, not entirely unknown to Edward. He turned, and discovered the lady who accompanied Blanche to Mr. Clarkson's.

Both parties experienced some embarrassment. Edward, ashamed of the violence he had recently displayed, remembering, too, the scene which Mrs. Turner had witnessed, after bowing slightly, nearly turned his back upon her; while she, panic struck by the ruffled expression which his features still wore, seated herself and taking up some needle work, appeared for the moment more engrossed with that, than inclined to enter into conversation. But although timid, Mrs. Turner was neither ill-bred nor incapable of conversing; when, therefore, suddenly recollecting himself, Edward inquired for Miss Bransby, he was informed with gentle dignity, that, in pursuance of an engagement, she and Blanche had driven over to Conyngsby. This was precisely as Mr. Vavasour had calculated: and he could not help thinking his stars particularly unpropitious that Mrs. Turner should have arrived on the preceding evening, and that the stupid servant should have admitted him.

After about ten minutes' uneasy conversation, he rose to depart. His companion pointed his attention to a heavy shower at that time falling. "It was," he said, "of no consequence; he was going straight home; besides, he had been used to rough weather."

Whether intentionally or not, the last was spoken significantly; Mrs. Turner caught and followed his meaning.

"Yes, Mr. Vavasour, you have seen the

possibly, you have some peremptory engagement."

"No," Edward answered, moodily.

"Then, wait, and bid her farewell. Pray do; otherwise, I am quite satisfied, she will feel hurt and mortified: for Blanche's mind is, I grieve to say, in that morbid state when every trifling omission appears an intentional slight. Poor girl! She is, literally, heart-sore."

"I should be sorry to occasion annoyance to Miss Vavasour; but, indeed, I have no reason to believe, that I possess the power of pleasing or displeasing—soothing or distressing her."

"You labour under a mistake. As you are cognisant of every circumstance of her history—at least, as far as her unhappy father was concerned—you are precisely the individual by whom the greatest circumspection should be exercised. If you leave ——shire in an unkind, unrelationlike manner, Blanche will immediately imagine that you despise her on account of Mr. Vavasour's misconduct."

Edward looked vexed.

"No, no—" he was beginning, impatiently; when the sound of wheels checked him, and a minute afterwards a carriage swept by the window.

"Here they are," said Mrs. Turner. "Well, my dear, how did you find your friends at Conyngsby?" she continued, addressing Blanche, who alone entered the room; Miss Bransby's progress having been arrested by a letter bearing the London post-mark, which she stood reading in the hall. "Are they all well?"

"No. My little favourite, Sarah, is complaining: so my intention of bringing her back " with me has been frustrated."

"Her mother would not trust her with you, I suppose."

"Would not even hear of it. You are aware, Mrs. Revely's maternal anxiety almost touches the ridiculous."

" So does the sublime," rejoined Mrs. Tur-

ner, smiling. "And it will be long before you persuade me that maternal affection can ever be ridiculous."

- " I will take you to Conyngsby, and force you to admit it may be so. Do you remember our visit there?" said Blanche, addressing Mr. Vavasour.
- "I have not forgotten it," he answered stiffly.
- "I suppose you are aware that poor Miss Swansea, the governess, has made a very happy marriage?"
- "Yes, I was very glad to hear it." And there was silence.
- " Is Sir John Evelyn still at Conyngsby?" inquired Mrs. Turner, by way of saying something.

"He is there till Saturday. And if Sarah is considered well enough to leave her mother, he will then deposit her here on his way to London."

"Sarah is a great favourite of Sir John's, I think you told me?"

VOL. III.

"Yes; his decided favourite. Perhaps, because she is so like him."

" Is she pretty?"

"Extremely," Mr. Vavasour remarked, at length. "Sarah Revely is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw; and unless she alters greatly for the worse, will, one day, be——"

"Hanged!—" shrieked Miss Bransby, darting into the room, "hanged or transported!

As sure as possible, he will be hanged. My brain's on fire!—my heart will burst!—I shall go distracted!—I'm suffocating—oh!——"

"What—what?" cried Blanche; while Mrs. Turner stood with eyes dilated from amazement, and Edward placed a chair, into which the agitated old lady threw herself, still screaming.

"He will be hanged, I know; I know he will. Oh, Mr. Edward, this is all your father's fault."

"What in the world has happened? Dearest aunt, what is it?"

- " Arthur-" gasped Miss Bransby.
- " But what of him?"
- " He'll be hanged, I tell you. As sure as fate, they'll hang him."
 - " How? wby?"
- "I must go up to town this very night. Nothing else can save that darling boy; and even if I go, I'm sure I shan't know what to do. Mr. Edward, what would you advise?"

Edward murmured something about "circumstances—information."

"Very true," said Miss Bransby. "You know nothing about it. Where's the letter? what have I done with it? Goodness! I hope I haven't lost it. Oh, here it is. Read it—pray read it, and tell me if you think that poor boy has a single chance?"

Edward took the paper from Miss Bransby's shaking hand, and read the contents aloud. Arthur was himself the writer, and he informed his aunt, that a short time since, he had unwarily, indorsed a bill, drawn by a

friend of his; which friend had proved a defaulter, and absconded; leaving him to answer the demand; and that possessing no adequate funds to discharge the debt, he had been placed in durance vile.

Miss Bransby groaned aloud.

- " Dreadful!" she said, when Edward had concluded.
- "But not so bad as you imagine," urged Mrs. Turner. "The sum is, certainly, a heavy one, and Arthur's present predicament not the most pleasant in the world. Still, he can be extricated."
- "You know nothing at all about the matter," cried Miss Bransby, testily snatching the letter from Edward. "It's a dreadful, horrible thing that's happened, and it's impossible to say what will be the upshot of it. My poor, poor boy! To think of your coming to such an end as this, after all the care and money I have spent upon you—not that I grudge either but oh, if you should be hanged!"

- " My dear aunt, there is no danger of Arthur being hanged."
- " Hold your tongue, Blanche," cried Miss Bransby, in the excess of her excitement, making a spring from the ground. "How should a chit like you know anything about law. I say, he may; and I'm no ignoramus in these matters. Remember how cleverly I made your father pay me that annuity; although he, and you, and his solicitor—aye, and my own into the bargain, declared I should never get a shilling of the money. But I was right; and so I am at present, rely upon it. Mr. Edward, I see you think as I do; Arthur will be transported, even, if he is not hanged outright. Now, don't contradict me, Blanche; you only show your Poor boy, I wonder whether ignorance. they've put him into irons? Mr. Edward, do you suppose they have?"
- "Oh, no," cried Edward, "nothing of that sort will be done. Set your mind quite at ease."

"Set my mind quite at ease, with that poor boy in gaol? Why, I declare you're as bad as Blanche!"

"Indeed, my dear Miss Bransby, you are taking a false view of Arthur's situation. His predicament is not a pleasant one, I grant; but neither in its nature nor its consequences will it involve any such result as you anticipate."

" Sir, you are mocking me!"

" Arthur wants nothing but a friend to pay the money for him, and he will be at liberty."

" Nonsense !"

" My dear aunt, if you will only look calmly at the nature of the case—"

" I shall go to town, immediately. Ring the bell, that I may order a place to be secured by this night's mail."

"Would not a letter to Mr. Clarkson save you the journey?"

" No; I would not trust to a letter, for the whole world."

"Then, is there no friend," said Mrs. Turner, "who would act on your behalf? Sir John Evelyn?"

Miss Bransby caught at the last suggestion.

- "Sir John Evelyn! I declare I quite forgot him. I really think he might assist us. And he's going to London, too. Blanche, my dear, write a note to Sir John Evelyn; explain to him how unhappily we are circumstanced, and ask him if he thinks he can be friend us."
- "Not to Sir John Evelyn. Pray don't apply to him."
 - " And why not, I should like to know?"
- "Because, Sir John Evelyn is almost a stranger to us, and might consider the request intrusive."
 - " Pooh!"
- "Will you make me your deputy?" asked Edward. "I assure you, that if you will trust this matter to my guidance, there shall be no delay, no want of zeal. I will make every effort to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

Will you intrust me, dear Miss Bransby? As a relation, I feel I have a right to interfere,"

"Dear Mr. Edward, you are very, very kind; and I've no doubt that you'd manage this sad business quite as well as anybody else would do. But you're not going up to town?"

"I will set off this evening if you allow me."

"And the money? It's a large sum;—sixteen hundred pounds."

"Leave every thing to me. Give me permission to act on Arthur's behalf, and I will make every necessary arrangement for his liberation."

"How very kind! But can you—will you set off this very night? For, you know, we ought not to lose a moment in getting the dear boy out of that horrid place. Will you, really, go to-night?"

" Assuredly, I will."

"Oh, no;" cried Blanche; who, sooth to

say, was more struck by the sudden change in Edward's manner, than by Arthur's unpleasant situation: "surely Mr. Vavasour need not go himself to town? A letter to his man of business would answer the purpose quite as well."

"Blanche, I declare you absolutely petrify me! I never saw any thing so unnatural in all my life. I don't believe you care one atom whether your brother's hanged or not. It's really shocking, and I'm perfectly ashamed of you. But don't you mind her, Mr. Vavasour. Be as good as your word; and an old woman's blessing shall go with you. Now don't lose any time; 'fly on the wings of love!'"

Miss Bransby pronounced the concluding sentence with a sort of comic dignity, so at variance with her former agitated expressions, that Mrs. Turner could not repress a smile. Edward turned timidly towards Blanche; her colour rose, and her eyes were suddenly cast down.

- "And, be sure of one thing, Mr. Edward;"
 pursued Miss Bransby; "be sure that when
 you've got that poor boy once out of gaol, you
 don't let him out of your sight for a single
 moment. If you do, ten to one but he'll be
 getting into some fresh scrape. And you must
 write to us."
- " May I?" said Edward, looking meaningly at Blanche. " May I write?"
- "Surely," she answered, trying to appear indifferent.
- "And may I bring your brother back with me?"
- "I thought," Mrs. Turner remarked, a little maliciously, "I thought, Mr. Vavasour, that you were going abroad immediately." And the colour fled from Blanche's cheek.
- "Going abroad!" exclaimed Miss Bransby.

 "I hope not; at least, I hope you won't think
 of doing such a thing till you've brought Arthur
 back again. Promise me you won't."
 - " I do, most faithfully."

- "Good bye, then. Let me hear from you the instant you've done any thing about him. I will write to my bankers to hand over the money to you; but if it should be necessary for me to go to London, myself, of course, you'll let me know."
 - " Rely on me, every way."
- "You're very kind. I'm sure, I don't know how to thank you half enough. Blanche, why don't you say something to Mr. Vavasour, instead of standing there like a—a—a—I protest I don't know what to call it?"
- "Adieu," said Edward, holding out his hand to Blanche.

Her farewell was a silent one.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mr. Vavasour obeyed Miss Bransby's directions, and wrote to her from London. Blanche likewise received a letter, which was shewn to neither of her companions; which remained unanswered, and which occasioned much thought, and many conflicting considerations.

She still loved Edward far too well to refuse him altogether; yet, with the remembrance of his former violence, prudence suggested that their union might prove a hazardous experiment. He had been considerate and gentle, latterly; but who should insure, that if temptation offered, he would not enact the same rough part again?"

Edward, however, would not be discouraged. When last in her society, he had seen more of Blanche's feelings than she suspected; and a man, who feels and knows his power, is not easily repulsed.

It was on one of those sweet autumn days, when summer seems all loth to leave a land she visits tardily, and where she does not often linger, that Edward, accompanied by the released and penitent Arthur, reached Ashurst. Miss Bransby's ecstasy was infinite. Nothing like a reproach escaped her; not even an upbraiding look; on the contrary, she nearly suffocated her nephew by demonstrations of affection and happiness, which Edward did not entirely escape.

"Where's Blanche?" she cried, after having satisfied herself that her beloved Arthur had not received bodily ill from his incarceration. "Why doesn't she come and see you? Where can Blanche be?"

Edward could have informed Miss Bransby; for in driving up to the house, he had discerned two ladies walking in the shrubbery; and taking the first opportunity of withdrawing from the scene of aunt Letitia's raptures, he traced their steps, and took his place beside the elder. Ten minutes afterwards, the trio last one of its number: Mrs. Turner became suddenly too much fatigued to saunter longer, and returned to the house.

"Blanche," said Edward, after a few remarks, in which neither he nor his companion evinced much depth of thought, or acuteness of observation; "Blanche, will you again reject me?"

"Mr. Vavasour," she answered, in a tone of voice so steady, that Edward's heart fell; "you must give me credit for more sincerity than such assurances usually deserve, when I say, that I feel highly honoured by your preference; that I value your esteem, and that there has even been a time when a letter like that I recently received, would have been more than welcome."

" Has been ?"

"Yes;" Blanche answered, faintly smiling;
"has been. Now do not quarrel with those words. It is better, believe me, it is better for both of us, that friendship ——"

Edward shook his head.

- "We must be more than friends," he said, or nothing."
- "I do not see that," she rejoined, with rather more gaiety; "I don't see why we mayn't be friends, and very good friends, too. You will not be angry with me for saying 'No?' At least, not so angry as you were before; will you?"
- "It is, then, the remembrance of that unfortunate scene at Mr. Clarkson's which shuts your heart against me. Well—I have no right to murmur. After such conduct, my offer appears, and is, perhaps, presumptuous. I feared that this would be the case; therefore, when Harriet Greville cancelled the engagement then existing, I told her that our marriage was impossible. I did not explain why; in fact, I could not have done it, without betraying circumstances I had determined to conceal. But I was satisfied that my violence must have revolted you beyond all hope of forgiveness. Under that impression, also, I have since studiously avoided your society; nor

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And, unless a higher governing principle than mere impulse be obeyed, what rational hope can any one possess, that should temptation offer, he would have power to resist. Nay, do not frown; do not look distressed. I am not happy in deciding as I do."

"Then why adhere to a decision, which you acknowledge causes you pain, and which nearly breaks my heart?"

"Principle;" Blanche answered in a faltering voice. And she rejoiced that a message from Miss Bransby, requiring her presence within doors, put an end to the conversation.

Widely different was Edward's frame of mind, from that he had experienced on a former occasion. It was not only that he suspected himself dear to Blanche, and anger, therefore, was utterly uncalled for; but, with his love, there mingled a sentiment of high esteem, of lofty admiration, which raised her far above the range of other women. She was not now, as once before, a beautiful plaything fitted for his amusement: she was not a some-

thing he might pet and humour into happing but she was an exalted being, whom he mi worship, whom he might adore, but whom might no longer even hope to win. Blan might not be easily won by any man; then, assuredly, by one who had betrayed a bad, and violent, and offensive feeling.

"I deserve it—I deserve it all," he so while they stood together near the entrance the house. "I am unworthy your affects and never again will I press mine on y But do not, on that account, imagine I h ceased to love you. Do not count my sile as indifference. Oh, no; here, or away; my own country, or in foreign lands; in m hood, or in age; in suffering, or in ease; happiness, or grief, your image will be e garnered in my heart, as its most valued a its choicest treasure."

"You are then, really, going to leave E land?"

"I thought of it. Wish me well; say and word to me before we part."

Blanche did not answer; but a tear stole gently down her cheek. Edward observed that tear—and his journey was foregone.

It were scarcely needful to describe the wedding. To dwell on favours, bridecake, and carriages and four. Or say, how the bride wept, and blushed, and smiled at once; how grave, and yet how happy, altogether happy, the exulting bridegroom shewed himself; how Harriet laughed, and Godfrey joked, and Arthur rubbed his uncouth hands, and Miss Letitia gloried in her niece's splendid matrimonial prospects, her own sagacity and foresight. Nor need the reader be assured that the union amply realised each promise, answered every prayer.

There are various paths by which men's hearts are led to righteousness. Blanche had always been piously disposed; but it was the many sorrows she was destined to experience, which imparted to her character the tone almost of sublimity it finally acquired. Edward was drawn by his affection. Deeply humbled

by the rejection of his suit, yet experiencing neither bitterness nor indignation, he was led to examine searchingly his heart; to study his defects, to recognise and to deplore his errors.

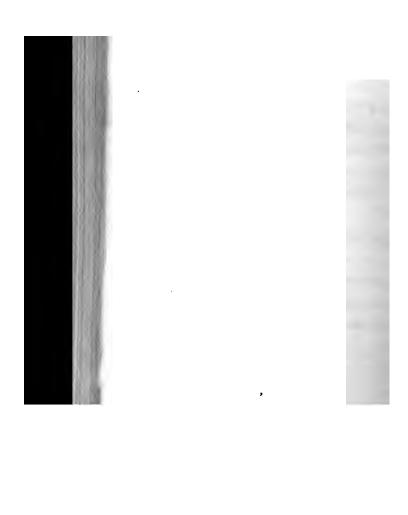
And the result was fraught with triumph to himself, and happiness to her he loved.

"Edward, I wish Lord Warleigh were well married. I am so partial to him."

"In that case, I suppose, I must join in your wish; and give you my assistance in looking out for a wife for him. Would Sarah Revely do?"

"In a year or two, admirably."







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